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The Mark of Cain.

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THE MARK OF CAIN

BY

ANDREW LANG

AUTHOR OF

"BALLADES IN BLUE CHINA" "CUSTOMS AND MYTH"

ETC

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THE MARK OF CAIN.

CHAPTER I.

A Tale of Two Clubs.

"Such arts the gods who dwell on high
Have given to the Greek."—*Lays of Ancient Rome.*

IN the Strangers' Room of the Olympic Club the air was thick with tobacco-smoke, and, despite the bitter cold outside, the temperature was uncomfortably high. Dinner was over, and the guests, broken up into little groups, were chattering noisily. No one had yet given any sign of departing: no one had offered a welcome apology for the need of catching an evening train.

Perhaps the civilised custom which permits women to dine in the presence of the greedier sex is the proudest conquest of Culture. Were it not for the excuse of "joining the ladies," dinner parties (like the congregations in Heaven, as described in the hymn) would "ne'er break up," and suppers (like Sabbaths, on the same authority) would never end.

"Hang it all, will the fellows *never* go?"

So thought Maitland, of St. Gatien's, the founder of the feast. The inhospitable reflections which we have recorded had all been passing through his brain as he rather moodily watched

the twenty guests he had been feeding,—one can hardly say entertaining. It was a "duty dinner" he had been giving,—almost everything Maitland did was done from a sense of duty,—yet he scarcely appeared to be reaping the reward of an approving conscience. His acquaintances, laughing and gossiping round the half-empty wine-glasses, the olives, the scattered fruit, and "the ashes of the weeds of their delight," gave themselves no concern about the weary host. Even at his own party, as in life generally, Maitland felt like an outsider. He wakened from his reverie as a strong hand was laid lightly on his shoulder.

"Well, Maitland," said a man sitting down beside him, "what have *you* been doing this long time?"

"What have I been doing, Barton?" Maitland answered. "Oh, I have been reflecting on the choice of a life, and trying to humanise myself! Bielby says I have not enough human nature."

"Bielby is quite right; he is the most judicious of College dons and father confessors, old man. And how long do you mean to remain his pupil and penitent? And how is the pothouse getting on?"

Frank Barton, the speaker, had been at school with Maitland, and ever since, at College and in life, had bullied, teased, and befriended him. Barton was a big young man, with great thews and sinews, and a broad breast beneath his broadcloth and wide shirt-front. He was blonde, prematurely bald, with an aquiline commanding nose, keen merry blue eyes, and a short fair beard. He had taken a medical as well as other degrees at the University; he had studied at Vienna and Paris; he was even what Captain Costigan styles "a scoientific cyarkter." He had written

learnedly in various Proceedings of erudite societies; he had made a cruise in a man-of-war, a scientific expedition; and his *Les Tatouages, Etude Médico-Légale*, published in Paris, had been commended by the highest authorities. Yet, from some whim of philanthropy, he had not a home and practice in Cavendish Square, but dwelt and laboured in Chelsea.

"How is your pothouse getting on?" he asked again.

"The pothouse? Oh, the *Hit or Miss* you mean? Well, I 'm afraid it 's not very successful. I took the lease of it, you know, partly by way of doing some good in a practical kind of way. The working men at the waterside won't go to clubs, where there is nothing but coffee to drink, and little but tracts to read. I thought if I gave them sound beer, and looked in among them now and then of an evening, I might help to civilise them a bit, like that fellow who kept the Thieves' Club in the East-end. And then I fancied they might help to make *me* a little more human. But it does not seem quite to succeed. I fear I am a born wet blanket. But the idea is good. Mrs. St. John Deloraine quite agrees with me about *that*. And she is a high authority."

"Mrs. St. John Deloraine? I 've heard of her. She is a lively widow, isn't she?"

"She is a practical philanthropist," answered Maitland, flushing a little.

"Pretty too, I have been told?"

"Yes; she is 'conveniently handsome,' as Izaak Walton says."

"I say, Maitland, here 's a chance to humanise you. Why don't you ask her to marry you? Pretty and philanthropic and rich,—what better would you ask?"

"I wish everyone wouldn't bother a man to

marry," Maitland replied testily, and turning red in his peculiar manner; for his complexion was pale and unwholesome.

"What a queer chap you are, Maitland: what 's the matter with you? Here you are, young, entirely without encumbrances, as the advertisements say, no relations to worry you, with plenty of money, let alone what you make by writing, and yet you are not happy. What is the matter with you?"

"Well, you should know best. What 's the good of your being a doctor, and acquainted all these years with my moral and physical constitution (what there is of it), if you can't tell what 's the nature of my complaint?"

"I don't diagnose many cases like yours, old boy, down by the side of the water, among the hardy patients of Mundy and Barton, general practitioners. There is plenty of human nature *there!*"

"And do you mean to stay there with Mundy much longer?"

"Well, I don't know. A fellow is really doing some good, and it is a splendid practice for mastering surgery. They are always falling off roofs, or having weights fall on them, or getting jammed between barges, or kicking each other into most interesting jellies. Then the foreign sailors are handy with their knives. Altogether a man learns a good deal about surgery in Chelsea. But, I say," Barton went on, lowering his voice, "where on earth did you pick up——?"

Here he glanced significantly at a tall man, standing at some distance, the centre of half a dozen very youthful revellers.

"Cranley, do you mean? I met him at the *Trumpet* office. He was writing about the Coolie Labour Question and the Eastern Question. He has been in the South Seas, like you."

"Yes; he has been in a lot of queerer places than the South Seas," answered the other, "and he ought to know something about Coolies. He has dealt in them, I fancy."

"I daresay," Maitland replied rather wearily. "He seems to have travelled a good deal: perhaps he has travelled in Coolies, whatever they may be."

"Now, my dear fellow, do you know what kind of man your guest is, or don't you?"

"He seems to be a military and sporting kind of gent, so to speak," said Maitland; "but what does it matter?"

"Then you don't know why he left his private tutor's; you don't know why he left the University; you don't know why he left the Ninety-Second; you don't know, and no one does, what he did after that; and you never heard of that affair with the Frenchman in Egypt?"

"Well," Maitland replied, "about his ancient history I own I don't know anything. As to the row with the Frenchman at Cairo, he told me himself. He said the beggar was too small for him to lick, and that duelling was ridiculous."

"They didn't take that view of it at Shephard's Hotel."

"Well, it is not my affair," said Maitland. "One should see all sorts of characters, Bielby says. This is not an ordinary fellow. Why, he has been a sailor before the mast, he says, by way of adventure, and he is full of good stories. I rather like him, and he can't do my moral character any harm. *I'm* not likely to deal in Coolies, at my time of life, nor quarrel with warlike aliens."

"No; but he's not a good man to introduce to these boys from Oxford," Barton was saying, when the subject of their conversation came up, surrounded by his little court of undergraduates.

The Hon. Thomas Cranley was a good deal older than the company in which he found himself. Without being one of the hoary youths who play Falstaff to every fresh heir's Prince Harry, he was a middle-aged man, too obviously accustomed to the society of boys. His very dress spoke of a prolonged youth. A large cat's-eye, circled with diamonds, blazed solitary in his shirt-front, and his coat was cut after the manner of the contemporary reveller. His chin was clean shaven, and his face, though a good deal worn, was ripe, smooth, shining with good cheer, and of a purply bronze hue, from exposure to hot suns and familiarity with the beverages of many peoples. His full red lips, with their humorous corners, were shaded by a small black moustache, and his twinkling bistre-coloured eyes, beneath mobile black eyebrows, gave Cranley the air of a jester and a good fellow. In manner he was familiar, with a kind of deference, too, and reserve, "like a dog that is always wagging his tail and deprecating a kick," thought Barton grimly, as he watched the other's genial advance.

"He's going to say good-night, bless him," thought Maitland gratefully. "Now the others will be moving too, I hope!"

So Maitland rose with much alacrity as Cranley approached him. To stand up would show, he thought, that he was not inhospitably eager to detain the parting guest.

"Good-night, Mr. Maitland," said the senior, holding out his hand.

"It is still early," said the host, doing his best to play his part. "Must you really go?"

"Yes; the night's young" (it was about half-past twelve), "but I have a kind of engagement to look in at the Cockpit, and three or four of your young friends here are anxious to come with

me, and see how we keep it up round there. Perhaps you and your friend will walk with us." Here he bowed slightly in the direction of Barton.

"There will be a little *bac* going on," he continued,—"*un petit bac de santé;* and these boys tell me they have never played anything more elevating than loo."

"I 'm afraid I am no good at a round game," answered Maitland, who had played at his Aunt's at Christmas, and who now observed with delight that everyone was moving; "but here is Barton, who will be happy to accompany you, I daresay."

"If you 're for a frolic, boys," said Barton, quoting Dr. Johnson, and looking rather at the younger men than at Cranley, "why, I will not balk you. Good-night, Maitland."

And he shook hands with his host.

"Good-nights" were uttered in every direction; sticks, hats, and umbrellas were hunted up; and while Maitland, half-asleep, was being whirled to his rooms in Bloomsbury in a hansom, his guests made the frozen pavement of Piccadilly ring beneath their elegant heels.

"It is only round the corner," said Cranley to the four or five men who accompanied him. "The Cockpit, where I am taking you, is in a fashionable slum off St. James's. We 're just there."

There was nothing either meretricious or sinister in the aspect of that favoured resort, the Cockpit, as the Decade Club was familiarly called by its friends—and enemies. Two young Merton men and the freshman from New, who were enjoying their Christmas vacation in town, and had been dining with Maitland, were a little disappointed in the appearance of the place. They had hoped to knock mysteriously at a back door in a lane, and to be shown, after investigation through

a loopholed wicket, into a narrow staircase, which, again, should open on halls of light, full of blazing wax candles and magnificent lacqueys, while a small mysterious man would point out the secret hiding-room, and the passages leading on to the roof or into the next house, in case of a raid by the police. Such was the old idea of a "Hell;" but the advance of Thought has altered all these early notions. The Decade Club was like any other small club. A current of warm air, charged with tobacco-smoke, rushed forth into the frosty night when the swinging door was opened; a sleepy porter looked out of his little nest, and Cranley wrote the names of the companions he introduced in a book which was kept for that purpose.

"Now you are free of the Cockpit for the night," he said, genially. "It's a livelier place, in the small hours, than that classical Olympic we've just left."

They went upstairs, passing the doors of one or two rooms, lit up but empty, except for two or three men who were sleeping in uncomfortable attitudes on sofas. The whole of the breadth of the first floor, all the drawing-room of the house before it became a club, had been turned into a card-room, from which brilliant lights, voices, and a heavy odour of tobacco and alcohol poured out when the door was opened. A long green baize-covered table, of very light wood, ran down the centre of the room, while refreshments stood on smaller tables, and a servant out of livery sat, half-asleep, behind a great desk in the remotest corner. There were several empty chairs round the green baize-covered table, at which some twenty men were sitting, with money before them; while one, in the middle, dealt out the cards on a broad flap of smooth black leather let into the

baize. Every now and then he threw the cards he had been dealing into a kind of well in the table, and after every deal he raked up his winnings with a rake, or distributed gold and counters to the winners, as mechanically as if he had been a croupier at Monte Carlo. The players, who were all in evening dress, had scarcely looked up when the strangers entered the room.

"Brought some recruits, Cranley?" asked the Banker, adding, as he looked at his hand, "*J'en donne!*" and becoming absorbed in his game again.

"The game you do not understand?" said Cranley to one of his recruits.

"Not quite," said the lad, shaking his head.

"All right; I will soon show you all about it; and I wouldn't play, if I were you, till you *know* all about it. Perhaps, after you know *all* about it, you 'll think it wiser not to play at all. At least, you might well think so abroad, where very fishy things are often done. Here it 's all right, of course."

"Is baccarat a game you can be cheated at, then—I mean, when people are inclined to cheat?"

"Cheat? Oh, rather! There are about a dozen ways of cheating at baccarat."

The other young men from Maitland's party gathered round their mentor, who continued his instructions in a low voice, and from a distance whence the play could be watched, while the players were not likely to be disturbed by the conversation.

"Cheating is the simplest thing in the world, at Nice or in Paris," Cranley went on; "but to show you how it is done, in case you ever do play in foreign parts, I must explain the game. You see the men first put down their stakes within the thin white line on the edge of the table. Then the Banker deals two cards to one of the men on

his left, and all the fellows on that side stand by *his* luck. Then he deals two to a chappie on his right, and all the punters on the right back that sportsman. And he deals two cards to himself. The game is to get as near nine as possible, ten, and court cards, not counting at all. If the Banker has eight or nine, he does not offer cards; if he has less, he gives the two players, if they ask for them, one card each, and takes one himself if he chooses. If they hold six, seven, or eight, they stand; if less, they take a card. Sometimes one stands at five: it depends. Then the Banker wins if he is nearer nine than the players, and they win if *they* are better than he; and that's the whole affair."

"I don't see where the cheating can come in," said one of the young fellows.

"Dozens of ways, as I told you. A man may have an understanding with the waiter, and play with arranged packs; but the waiter is always the dangerous element in *that* little combination. He's sure to peach or blackmail his accomplice. Then the cards may be marked. I remember, at Ostend, one fellow, a big German; he wore spectacles, like all Germans, and he seldom gave the players anything better than three court cards when he dealt. One evening he was in awful luck, when he happened to go for his cigar-case, which he had left in the hall in his great-coat pocket. He laid down his spectacles on the table, and someone tried them on. As soon as he took up the cards he gave a start, and sang out, 'Here's a swindle! *Nous sommes volés!*' He could see, by the help of the spectacles, that all the nines and court cards were marked; and the spectacles were regular patent double million magnifiers."

"And what became of the owner of the glasses?"

"Oh, he just looked into the room, saw the man

wearing them, and didn't wait to say good-night. He just *went!*"

Here Cranley chuckled.

"I remember another time, at Nice: I always laugh when I think of it! There was a little Frenchman, who played nearly every night. He would take the Bank for three or four turns, and he almost always won. Well, one night he had been at the theatre, and he left before the end of the piece and looked in at the Cercle. He took the Bank: lost once, won twice; then he offered cards. The man who was playing nodded, to show he would take one, and the Frenchman laid down an eight of clubs, a greasy, dirty old rag, with THEATRE FRANÇAIS DE NICE stamped on it in big letters. It was his ticket of re-admission at the theatre that they gave him when he went out, and it had got mixed up with a nice little arrangement in cards he had managed to smuggle into the club pack. I'll never forget his face and the other man's when *Théâtre Français* turned up. However, you understand the game now, and if you want to play, we had better give fine gold to the waiter in exchange for bone counters, and get to work."

Two or three of the visitors followed Cranley to the corner where the white dissipated-looking waiter of the card-room sat, and provided themselves with black and red *jetons* (bone counters) of various values, to be redeemed at the end of the game.

When they returned to the table the Banker was just leaving his post.

"I'm cleaned out," said he, "*décavé*. Good-night," and he walked away.

No one seemed anxious to open a bank. The punters had been winning all night, and did not like to desert their luck.

"Oh, this will never do," cried Cranley. "If no one else will open a bank, I 'll risk a couple of hundred, just to show you beginners how it is done!"

Cranley sat down, lit a cigarette, and laid the smooth silver cigarette-case before him. Then he began to deal.

Fortune at first was all on the side of the players. Again and again Cranley chucked out the counters he had lost, which the others gathered in, or pushed three or four bank-notes with his little rake in the direction of a more venturesome winner. The new comers, who were winning, thought they had never taken part in a sport more gentlemanly and amusing.

"I must have one shy," said Martin, one of the boys who had hitherto stood with Barton, behind the Banker, looking on. He was a gaudy youth with a diamond stud, rich, and not fond of losing. He staked five pounds and won; he left the whole sum on and lost, lost again, a third time, and then said, "May I draw a cheque?"

"Of course you may," Cranley answered. "The waiter will give you *tout ce qu'il faut pour écrire*, as the stage directions say; but I don't advise you to plunge. You 've lost quite enough. Yet they say the devil favours beginners, so you can't come to grief."

The young fellow by this time was too excited to take advice. His cheeks had an angry flush, his hands trembled as he hastily constructed some paper currency of considerable value. The parallel horizontal wrinkles of the gambler were just sketched on his smooth girlish brow as he returned with his paper. The bank had been losing, but not largely. The luck turned again as soon as Martin threw down some of his scrip. Thrice consecutively he lost.

"Excuse me," said Barton suddenly to Cranley, "may I help myself to one of your cigarettes?"

He stooped as he spoke, over the table, and Cranley saw him pick up the silver cigarette-case. It was a handsome piece of polished silver.

"Certainly; help yourself. Give me back my cigarette-case, please, when you have done with it."

He dealt again, and lost.

"What a nice case!" said Barton, examining it closely. "There is an Arabic word engraved on it."

"Yes, yes," said Cranley, rather impatiently, holding out his hand for the thing, and pausing before he dealt. "The case was given me by the late Khédive, dear old Ismail, bless him! The word is a talisman."

"I thought so. The case seemed to bring you luck," said Barton.

Cranley half turned and threw a quick look at him, as rapid and timid as the glance of a hare in its form.

"Come, give me it back, please," he said.

"Now, just oblige me: let me try what there is in luck. Go on playing while I rub up my Arabic, and try to read this ineffable name on the case. Is it the Word of Power of Solomon?"

Cranley glanced back again. "All right," he said, "as you are so curious,—*j'en donne!*"

He offered cards, and lost. Martin's face brightened up. His paper currency was coming back to him.

"It's a shame," grumbled Cranley, "to rob a fellow of his fetich. Waiter, a small brandy-and-soda! Confound your awkwardness! Why do you spill it over the cards?"

By Cranley's own awkwardness, more than the waiter's, a little splash of the liquid had fallen in front of him, on the black leather part of the table

where he dealt. He went on dealing, and his luck altered again. The rake was stretched out over both halves of the long table: the gold and notes and counters, with a fluttering assortment of Martin's I O U's, were all dragged in. Martin went to the den of the money-changer sullenly, and came back with fresh supplies.

"Banco!" he cried, meaning that he challenged Cranley for all the money in the bank. There must have been some seven hundred pounds.

"All right," said Cranley, taking a sip of his soda water. He had dealt two cards, when his hands were suddenly grasped as in two vices, and cramped to the table. Barton had bent over from behind and caught him by the wrists.

Cranley made one weak automatic movement to extricate himself; then he sat perfectly still. His face, which he turned over his shoulder, was white beneath the stains of tan, and his lips were blue.

"Damn you!" he snarled. "What trick are you after now?"

"Are you drunk, Barton?" cried some one.

"Leave him alone!" shouted some of the players, rising from their seats; while others, pressing round Barton, looked over his shoulder without seeing any excuse for his behaviour.

"Gentlemen," said Barton, in a steady voice, "I leave my conduct in the hands of the club. If I do not convince them that Mr. Cranley has been cheating, I am quite at their disposal, and at his. Let anyone who doubts what I say look here."

"Well, I'm looking here, and I don't see what you are making such a fuss about," said Martin, from the group behind, peering over at the table and the cards.

"Will you kindly—— No, it is no use." The last remark was addressed to the captive, who

had tried to release his hands. "Will you kindly take up some of the cards and deal them slowly, to right and left, over that little puddle of spilt soda water on the leather? Get as near the table as you can."

There was a dead silence while Martin made this experiment.

"By gad, I can see every pip on the cards!" cried Martin.

"Of course you can; and if you had the art of correcting fortune, you could make use of what you see. At the least you would know whether to take a card or stand."

"*I* didn't," said the wretched Cranley. "How on earth was I to know that the infernal fool of a waiter would spill the liquor there, and give you a chance against me?"

"You spilt the liquor yourself," Barton answered coolly, "when I took away your cigarette-case. I saw you passing the cards over the surface of it, which anyone can see for himself is a perfect mirror. I tried to warn you—for I did not want a row—when I said the case 'seemed to bring you luck.' But you would not be warned; and when the cigarette-case trick was played out, you fell back on the old dodge with the drop of water. Will anyone else convince himself that I am right before I let Mr. Cranley go?"

One or two men passed the cards, as they had seen the Banker do, over the spilt soda water.

"It's a clear case," they said. "Leave him alone."

Barton slackened his grip of Cranley's hands, and for some seconds they lay as if paralysed on the table before him, white and cold, with livid circles round the wrists. The man's face was deadly pale, and wet with perspiration. He put out a trembling hand to the glass of brandy-and-

water that stood beside him; the glass rattled against his teeth as he drained all the contents at a gulp.

"You shall hear from me," he grumbled, and, with an inarticulate muttering of threats, he made his way, stumbling and catching at chairs, to the door. When he had got outside, he leaned against the wall, like a drunken man, and then shambled across the landing into a reading-room. It was empty, and Cranley fell into a large easy-chair, where he lay crumpled up, rather than sat, for perhaps ten minutes, holding his hand against his heart.

"They talk about having the courage of one's opinions. Confound it! Why haven't I the nerve for my character? Hang this heart of mine! Will it never stop thumping?"

He sat up and looked about him, then rose and walked towards the table; but his head began to swim, and his eyes to darken; so he fell back again in his seat, feeling drowsy and beaten. Mechanically he began to move the hand that hung over the arm of his low chair, and it encountered a newspaper which had fallen on the floor. He lifted it automatically and without thought: it was the *Times*. Perhaps to try his eyes, and see if they served him again after his collapse, he ran them down the columns of the advertisements.

Suddenly something caught his attention; his whole lax figure grew braced again as he read a passage steadily through more than twice or thrice. When he had quite mastered this, he threw down the paper and gave a low whistle.

"So the old boy 's dead," he reflected; "and that drunken tattooed ass and his daughter are to come in for the money and the mines! They'll be clever that find him, and I sha'n't give them his address! What luck some men have!"

Here he fell into deep thought, his brows and lips working eagerly.

"I 'll do it," he said at last, cutting the advertisement out of the paper with a penknife. "It isn't often a man has a chance to *star* in this game of existence. I 've lost all my own social Lives: one in that business at Oxford, one in the row at Ali Musjid, and the third went—to-night. But I 'll *star*. Every sinner should desire a new Life," he added with a sneer.*

He rose, steady enough now, walked to the door, paused and listened, heard the excited voices in the card-room still discussing him, slunk downstairs, took his hat and great-coat, and swaggered past the porter. Mechanically he felt in his pocket, as he went out of the porch, for his cigarette-case; and he paused at the little fount of fire at the door. He was thinking that he would never light a cigarette there again.

Presently he remembered, and swore. He had left his case on the table of the card-room, where Barton had laid it down, and he had not the impudence to send back for it.

"*Vile damnum!*" he muttered (for he had enjoyed a classical education), and so disappeared in the frosty night.

CHAPTER II.

In the Snow.

THE foul and foggy night of early February was descending, some weeks after the scene in the Cockpit, on the river and the town. Night was falling from the heavens; or rather, night seemed to be rising from the earth,—steamed up, black, from the dingy trampled snow of the

* "Starring" is paying for a new "Life" at Pool.

streets, and from the vapours that swam above the squalid houses. There was coal-smoke and a taste of lucifer matches in the air. In the previous night there had been such a storm as London seldom sees; the powdery, flying snow had been blown for many hours before a tyrannous north-east gale, and had settled down, like dust in a neglected chamber, over every surface of the city. Drifts and "snow-wreathes," as northern folk say, were lying in exposed places, in squares and streets, as deep as they lie when sheep are "smoored" on the sides of Sundhope or Penchrist in the desolate Border-land. All day London had been struggling under her cold winding-sheet, like a feeble, feverish patient trying to throw off a heavy white counterpane. Now the counterpane was dirty enough. The pavements were three inches deep in a rich greasy deposit of mud and molten ice. Above the round glass or iron coverings of coal cellars the foot passengers slipped, "ricked" their backs, and swore as they stumbled, if they did not actually fall down, in the filth. Those who were in haste, and could afford it, travelled, at fancy prices, in hansoms with two horses driven tandem. The snow still lay comparatively white on the surface of the less-frequented thoroughfares, with straight shining black marks where wheels had cut their way.

At intervals in the day the fog had fallen blacker than night. Down by the waterside the roads were deep in a mixture of a weak grey-brown or coffee colour. Beside one of the bridges in Chelsea, an open slope leads straight to the stream, and here, in the afternoon,—for a late start was made,—the carts of the Vestry had been led, and loads of slush that had choked up the streets in the more fashionable parts of the town had been unladen into the river. This may not be the most scientific or sanitary mode of

clearing the streets and squares, but it was the way that recommended itself to the wisdom of the Contractor. In the early evening the fog had lightened a little, but it fell sadly again, and grew so thick that the bridge was lost in mist half-way across the river, like the arches of that fatal bridge beheld by Mirza in his Vision. The masts of the vessels moored on the near bank disappeared from view, and only a red lamp or two shone against the blackness of the hulks. From the public-house at the corner—the *Hit or Miss*—streamed a fan-shaped flood of light, soon choked by the fog.

Out of the muddy twilight of a street that runs at right angles to the river, a cart came crawling; its high-piled white load of snow was faintly visible before the brown horses (they were yoked tandem) came into view. This cart was driven down to the water-edge, and was there upturned, with much shouting and cracking of whips on the part of the men engaged, and with a good deal of straining, slipping, and stumbling on the side of the horses.

One of the men jumped down, and fumbled at the iron pins which kept the backboard of the cart in its place.

"Blarm me, Bill," he grumbled, "if the blessed pins ain't froze."

Here he put his wet fingers in his mouth, blowing on them afterwards, and smacking his arms across his breast to restore the circulation.

The comrade addressed as Bill merely stared speechlessly as he stood at the smoking head of the leader, and the other man tugged again at the pin.

"It won't budge," he cried at last. "Just run into the *Hit or Miss* at the corner, mate, and borrow a hammer; and you might get a pint o' hot beer when ye're at it. Here's fourpence.

I was with three that found a quid in the *Mac*,* end of last week: here's the last of it."

He fumbled in his pocket, but his hands were so numb that he could scarcely capture the nimble fourpence. Why should the "nimble ninepence" have the monopoly of agility?

"I'm Blue Ribbon, Tommy, don't yer know," said Bill, with regretful sullenness. His ragged great-coat, indeed, was decorated with the azure badge of avowed and total abstinence.

"Blow yer blue ribbon! Hold on where ye are, and I 'll bring the bloomin' hammer myself."

Thus growling, Tommy strode indifferent through the snow, his legs protected by bandages of straw ropes. Presently he reappeared in the warmer yellow of the light that poured through the windows of the old public-house. He was wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, which he then thrust into the deeps of his pockets, hugging a hammer to his body under his armpit.

"A little hot beer would do yer bloomin' temper a deal more good than ten yards o' blue ribbon at sixpence. Blue ruin 's more in *my* line," observed Thomas, epigrammatically, much comforted by his refreshment. And with two well-directed taps he knocked the pins out of their sockets, and let down the backboard of the cart.

Bill, uncomforted by ale, sulkily jerked the horses forward; the cart was tilted up, and the snow tumbled out, partly into the shallow shore-water, partly on to the edge of the slope.

"Ullo!" cried Tommy suddenly. "'Ere's an old coat-sleeve a sticking out o' the snow."

"'Alves!" exclaimed Bill, with a noble eye on the main chance.

* "A quid in the *Mac*"—a sovereign in the street-scrapings, called *Mac* from Macadam, and employed as mortar in building eligible freehold tenements.

"'Alves! of course, 'alves. Ain't we on the same lay," replied the chivalrous Tommy. Then he cried, "Lord preserve us, mate; *there's a cove in the coat!*"

He ran forward, and clutched the elbow of the sleeve which stood up stiffly above the frozen mound of lumpy snow. He might well have thought at first that the sleeve was empty, such a very stick of bone and skin was the arm he grasped within it.

"Here, Bill, help us to dig him out, poor chap!"

"Is he dead?" asked Bill, leaving the horses' heads.

"Dead! he's bound to be dead, under all that weight. But how the dickens did he get into the cart? Guess we didn't shovel him in, eh: we'd have seen him?"

By this time the two men had dragged a meagre corpse out of the snow heap. A rough worn old pilot-coat, a shabby pair of corduroy trousers, and two broken boots through which the toes could be seen peeping ruefully, were all the visible raiment of the body. The clothes lay in heavy swathes and folds over the miserable bag of bones that had once been a tall man. The peaked blue face was half hidden by a fell of iron-grey hair, and a grizzled beard hung over the breast.

The two men stood for some moments staring at the corpse. A wretched woman in a thin grey cotton dress had come down from the bridge, and shivered beside the body for a moment.

"He's a goner," was her criticism. "I wish *I* was."

With this aspiration she shivered back into the fog again, walking on her unknown way. By this time a dozen people had started up from nowhere, and were standing in a tight ring round the body. The behaviour of the people was typical of London

gazers. No one made any remark, or offered any suggestion; they simply stared with all their eyes and souls, absorbed in the unbought excitement of the spectacle. They were helpless, idealess, interested and unconcerned.

"Run and fetch a peeler, Bill," said Tommy at last.

"Peeler be hanged! Bloomin' likely I am to find a peeler. Fetch him yourself."

"Sulky devil you are," answered Tommy, who was certainly of milder mood; whereas Bill seemed a most unalluring example of the virtue of Temperance. It is true that he had only been "Blue Ribbon" since the end of his Christmas bout—that is, for nearly a fortnight,—and Virtue, a precarious tenant, was not yet comfortable in her new lodgings.

Before Tommy returned from his quest the dusk had deepened into night. The crowd round the body in the pea-coat had grown denser, and it might truly be said that "the more part knew not wherefore they had come together." The centre of interest was not a fight, they were sure, otherwise the ring would have been swaying this way and that. Neither was it a dispute between a cabman and his fare: there was no sound of angry repartees. It might be a drunken woman, or a man in a fit, or a lost child. So the outer circle of spectators, who saw nothing, waited, and patiently endured till the moment of revelation should arrive. Respectable people who passed only glanced at the gathering: respectable people may wonder, but they never do find out the mystery within a London crowd. On the extreme fringe of the mob were some amateurs who had just been drinking in the *Hit or Miss*. They were noisy, curious, and impatient.

At last Tommy arrived with two policemen, who, acting on his warning, had brought with them a

stretcher. He had told them briefly how the dead man was found in the cart-load of snow.

Before the men in blue, the crowd of necessity opened. One of the officers stooped down and flashed his lantern on the heap of snow where the dead face lay, as pale as its frozen pillow.

"Lord, it's old Dicky Shields!" cried a voice in the crowd, as the peaked still features were lighted up.

The man who spoke was one of the latest spectators that had arrived, after the news that some pleasant entertainment was on foot had passed into the warm alcoholic air and within the swinging doors of the *Hit or Miss*.

"You know him, do you?" asked the policeman with the lantern.

"Know him, rather! Didn't I give him sixpence for rum when he tattooed this here cross and anchor on my arm? Dicky was a grand hand at tattooing, bless you: he'd tattooed himself all over!"

The speaker rolled up his sleeve, and showed, on his burly red forearm, the emblems of Faith and Hope rather neatly executed in blue.

"Why, he was in the *Hit or Miss*," the speaker went on, "no later nor last night."

"Wot beats me," said Tommy again, as the policeman lifted the light corpse, and tried vainly to straighten the frozen limbs, "Wot beats me is how he got in this here cart of ours."

"He's light enough surely," added Tommy; "but I warrant *we* didn't chuck him on the cart with the snow in Belgrave Square."

"Where do you put up at night?" asked one of the policemen suddenly. He had been ruminating on the mystery.

"In the yard there, behind that there hoarding," answered Tommy, pointing to a breached and

battered palisade near the corner of the public-house.

At the back of this ricketty plank fence, with its parti-coloured tatters of damp and torn advertisements, lay a considerable space of waste ground. The old houses that recently occupied the site had been pulled down, probably as condemned "slums," in some moment of reform, when people had nothing better to think of than the housing of the poor.

There had been an idea of building model lodgings for tramps, with all the latest improvements, on the space, but the idea evaporated when something else occurred to divert the general interest. Now certain sheds, with roofs sloped against the nearest walls, formed a kind of lumber-room for the parish.

At this time the scavengers' carts were housed in the sheds, or outside the sheds when these were overcrowded. Not far off were stables for the horses, and thus the waste ground was not left wholly unoccupied.

"Was this cart o' yours under the sheds all night or in the open?" asked the policeman with an air of penetration.

"Just outside the shed, worn't it, Bill?" replied Tommy.

Bill said nothing, being a person disinclined to commit himself.

"If the cart was outside," said the policeman, "then the thing's plain enough. You started from there, didn't you, with the cart in the afternoon?"

"Ay," answered Tommy.

"And there was a little sprinkle o' snow in the cart?"

"May be there wos. I don't remember one way or the other."

"Then you *must* be a stupid if you don't see that

this here cove," pointing to the dead man, "got drinking too much last night, lost hisself, and wandered inside the hoarding, where he fell asleep in the cart."

"Snow do make a fellow bloomin' sleepy," one of the crowd assented.

"Well, he never wakened no more, and the snow had covered over his body when you started with the cart, and him in it, unbeknown. He's light enough to make no difference to the weight. Was it dark when you started?"

"One of them spells of fog was on: you could hardly see your hand," grunted Tommy.

"Well then, it's as plain as—as the nose on your face," said the policeman, without any sarcastic intentions. "That's how it was."

"Bravo, Bobby!" cried one of the crowd. "They should make you an inspector, and set you to run in them dynamiting Irish coves."

The policeman was not displeased at this popular tribute to his shrewdness. Dignity forbade him, however, to acknowledge the compliment, and he contented himself with lifting the two handles of the stretcher which were next him. A covering was thrown over the face of the dead man, and the two policemen, with their burden, began to make their way northwards to the hospital.

A small mob followed them, but soon dwindled into a tail of street boys and girls. These accompanied the body till it disappeared from their eyes within the hospital doors. Then they waited for half an hour or so, and at last seemed to evaporate into the fog.

By this time Tommy and his mate had unharnessed their horses and taken them to stable, the cart was housed (beneath the sheds this time), and Bill had so far succumbed to the genial influences of the occasion as to tear off his blue badge and follow Tommy into the *Hit or Miss*.

A few chance acquaintances, hospitable and curious, accompanied them, intent on providing with refreshments and plying with questions the heroes of so remarkable an adventure. It is true that they already knew all Tommy and Bill had to tell; but there is a pleasure, in moments of emotional agitation, in repeating at intervals the same questions, and making over and over again the same profound remarks. The charm of these performances was sure to be particularly keen within the very walls where the dead man had probably taken his last convivial glass, and where some light was certain to be thrown, by the landlady or her customers, on the habits and history of poor Dicky Shields.

CHAPTER III.

An Academic Potbouse.

THE *Hit or Miss* tavern, to customers (rough customers, at least) who entered it on a foggy winter night, seemed merely a public by the river's brim. Not being ravaged and parched by a thirst for the picturesque, Tommy and his mates failed to pause and observe the architectural peculiarities of the building. Even if they had been of a romantic and antiquarian turn, the fog was so thick that they could have seen little to admire, though there was plenty to be admired. The *Hit or Miss* was not more antique in its aspect than modern in its fortunes. Few public-houses, if any, boasted for their landlord such a person as Robert Maitland, M.A., Fellow of St. Gatien's, in the University of Oxford.

It is, perhaps, desirable and even necessary to explain how this arrangement came into existence. We have already made acquaintance with "mine host" of the *Hit or Miss*, and found him to be by no means the rosy, genial Boniface of popular tradition. That a man like Maitland should be the lessee of a waterside tavern, like the *Hit or Miss*, was only one of the anomalies of this odd age of ours. An age of revivals, restorations, experiments,—an age of dukes who are Socialists,—an age which sees the East-end brawling in Pall Mall, and parties of West-end tourists personally conducted down Ratcliffe Highway,—need not wonder at Maitland's eccentric choice in philanthropy.

Maitland was an orphan, and rich. He had been an unpopular lonely boy at a public school, where he was known as a "sap," or assiduous student, and was remarked for an almost unnatural indifference to cricket and rowing. At Oxford, as he had plenty of money, he had been rather less unpopular. His studies ultimately won him a Fellowship at St. Gatien's, where his services as a tutor were not needed. Maitland now developed a great desire to improve his own culture by acquaintance with humanity, and to improve humanity by acquaintance with himself. This view of life and duty had been urged on him by his college "coach, philosopher and friend, Mr. Joseph Bielby. A man of some energy of character, Bielby had made Maitland leave his desultory reading and dull hospitalities at St. Gatien's, and betake himself to practical philanthropy.

"You tell me you don't see much in life," Bielby had said. "Throw yourself into the life of others, who have not much to live on."

Maitland made a few practical experiments in philanthropy at Oxford. He once subsidised a

number of glaziers out on strike, and thereon had his own windows broken by conservative undergraduates. He urged on the citizens the desirability of running a steam tramway for the people from the station to Cowley, through Worcester, John's, Balliol, and Wadham Gardens and Magdalene. His signature headed a petition in favour of having three "devils," or steam whoopers, yelling in different quarters of the town between five and six o'clock every morning, that the artisans might be awakened in time for the labours of the day.

As Maitland's schemes made more noise than progress at Oxford, Bielby urged him to come out of his Alma Mater, and practise benevolence in town. He had a great scheme for building over Hyde Park, and creating a Palace of Art in Poplar with the rents of the new streets. While pushing this ingenious idea in the columns of the *Daily Trumpet*, Maitland looked out for some humbler field of personal usefulness. The happy notion of taking a philanthropic public-house occurred to him, and was acted upon at the first opportunity. Maitland calculated that in his own bar-room he could acquire an intimate knowledge of humanity in its least sophisticated aspects. He would sell good beer, instead of drugged and adulterated stuff. He would raise the tone of his customers, while he would insensibly gain some of their exuberant vitality. He would shake off the prig (which he knew to be a strong element in his nature), and would, at the same time, encourage temperance by providing good malt liquor.

The scheme seemed feasible, and the next thing to do was to acquire a tavern. Now, Maitland had been in the Oxford movement just when æstheticism was fading out, like a lovely sun-stricken lily, while philanthropy and political

economy and Mr. Henry George were coming in, like roaring lions. Thus in Maitland there survived a little of the old leaven of the student of the Renaissance, a touch of the amateur of "impressions" and of antiquated furniture. He was always struggling against this "side," as he called it, of his "culture," and in his hours of reaction he was all for steam tramways, "devils," and Kindergartens standing where they ought not. But there were moments when his old innocent craving for the picturesque got the upper hand; and in one of those moments Maitland had come across the chance of acquiring the lease of the *Hit or Miss*.

That ancient bridge-house pleased him, and he closed with his opportunity. The *Hit or Miss* was as attractive to an artistic as most public-houses are to a thirsty soul. When the Embankment was made, the bridge-house had been one of a street of similar quaint and many-gabled old buildings that leaned up against each other for mutual support near the river's edge. But the Embankment slowly brought civilisation that way: the dirty rickety old houses were both condemned and demolished, till at last only the tavern remained, with hoardings and empty spaces, and a dust-yard round it.

The house stood at what had been a corner. The red-tiled roof was so high pitched as to be almost perpendicular. The dormer windows of the attics were as picturesque as anything in Nuremberg. The side walls were broken in their surface by little odd red-tiled roofs covering projecting casements, and the house was shored up and supported by huge wooden beams. You entered (supposing you to enter a public-house) by a low-browed door in front, if you passed in as ordinary customers did. At one corner

was an odd little board, with the old-fashioned sign:

"Jack's Bridge House.
"Hit or Miss—Luck's All."

But there was a side door, reached by walking down a covered way, over which the strong oaken rafters (revealed by the unflaking of the plaster) lay bent and warped by years and the weight of the building. From this door you saw the side, or rather the back, which the house kept for its intimates; a side even more picturesque with red-tiled roofs and dormer windows than that which faced the street. The passage led down to a slum, and on the left hand, as you entered, lay the empty space and the dust-yard, where the carts were sheltered in sheds, or left beneath the sky, behind the ruinous hoarding.

Within, the *Hit or Miss* looked cosy enough to persons entering out of the cold and dark. There was heat, light, and a bar-parlour with a wide old-fashioned chimney-place, provided with seats within the ingle. On these little benches did Tommy and his friends make haste to place themselves, comfortably disposed, and thawing rapidly, in a room within a room, as it were; for the big chimney-place was like a little chamber by itself. Not on an ordinary night could such a party have gained admittance to the bar-parlour, where Maitland himself was wont to appear, now and then, when he visited the tavern, and to produce by his mere presence, and without in the least intending it, an Early Closing Movement.

But to-night was no common night, and Mrs. Gullick, the widowed landlady, or rather manager, was as eager to hear all the story of the finding of poor Dicky Shields as any of the crowd outside had been. Again and again the narrative was

repeated, till conjecture once more began to take the place of assertion.

"I wonder," asked one of the men, "how old Dicky got the money for a booze?"

"The money, ay, and the chance," said another. "That daughter of his—a nice-looking girl she is—kept poor Dicky pretty tight."

"Didn't let him get——," the epigrammatist of the company was just beginning to put in, when the brilliant witticism he was about to utter burst at once on the intellect of all his friends.

"Didn't let him *get* tight, you was a-goin' to say, Tommy," howled three or four at once, and there ensued a great noise of the slapping of thighs, followed by chuckles which exploded, at intervals, like crackers.

"Dicky 'ad been 'avin' bad times for long," the first speaker went on. "I guess he 'ad about tattooed all the parish as would stand a pint for tattooing. There was hardly a square inch of skin not made beautiful for ever about here."

"Ah! and there was no sale for his beasteses and birdses nuther; or else he was clean sold out, and hadn't no capital to renew his stock of hairy cats and young parrots."

"The very stuffed beasts, perched above old Dicky's shop, had got to look real mangey and mouldy. I think I see them now: the fox in the middle, the long-legged moulting foreign bird at one end, and that 'ere shiny old rhinoceros in the porch under them picters of the dying deer and t'other deer swimming. Poor old Dicky! Where he raised the price o' a drain, let alone a booze, beats me, it does."

"Why," said Mrs. Gullick, who had been in the outer room during the conversation, "why, it was a sailor gentleman that stood Dicky treat. A most pleasant-spoken man for a sailor, with a big

black beard. He used to meet Dicky here, in the private room upstairs, and there Dicky used to do him a turn of his trade—tattooing him, like. 'I 'm doing him to pattern, mum,' Dicky sez, sez he: 'a *fac-simile* o' myself, mum.' It wasn't much they drank neither,—just a couple of pints; for sez the sailor gentleman, he sez, 'I 'm afeared, mum, our friend here can't carry much even of *your* capital stuff. We must excuse,' sez he, 'the failings of an artis'; but I doesn't want his hand to shake or slip when he 's a doin' *me*,' sez he. 'Might spile the pattern,' he sez, 'also hurt.' And I wouldn't have served old Dicky with more than was good for him, myself, not if it was ever so, I wouldn't. I promised that poor daughter of his, before Mr. Maitland sent her to school,—years ago now,—I promised as I would keep an eye on her father, and speak of—— A hangel, if here isn't Mr. Maitland his very self!"

And Mrs. Gullick arose, with bustling courtesy, to welcome her landlord, the Fellow of St. Gatien's.

Immediately there was a stir among the men seated in the ingle. One by one,—some with a muttered pretence at excuse, others with shamefaced awkwardness,—they shouldered and shuffled out of the room. Maitland's appearance had produced its usual effect, and he was left alone with his tenant.

"Well, Mrs. Gullick," said poor Maitland, ruefully, "I came here for a chat with our friends—a little social relaxation—on Economic questions, and I seem to have frightened them all away."

"Oh, sir, they 're a rough lot, and don't think themselves company for the likes of you. But," said Mrs. Gullick, eagerly,—with the delight of the oldest aunt in telling the saddest tale,—"you 've heard this hawful story? Poor Miss Margaret, sir! It makes my blood——"

What physiological effect on the circulation Mrs. Gullick was about to ascribe to alarming intelligence will never be known; for Maitland, growing a little more pallid than usual, interrupted her:

"What has happened to Miss Margaret? Tell me, quick!"

"Nothing to *herself*, poor lamb, but her poor father, sir."

Maitland seemed sensibly relieved.

"Well, what about her father?"

"Gone, sir,—gone! In a cartload o' snow, this very evening, he was found, just outside o' this very door."

"In a cartload of snow!" cried Maitland. "Do you mean that he went away in it, or that he was found in it dead?"

"Yes, indeed, sir; dead for many hours, the doctor said; and in this very house he had been no later than last night, and quite steady, sir, I do assure you. He had been steady—oh, steady for weeks."

Maitland assumed an expression of regret, which, no doubt, he felt to a certain extent. But in his sorrow there could not but have been some relief. For Maitland, in the course of his philanthropic labours, had known old Dicky Shields, the naturalist and professional tattooer, as a hopeless *mauvais sujet*. But Dicky's daughter, Margaret, had been a daisy flourishing by the grimy waterside, till the young social reformer transplanted her to a school in the purer air of Devonshire. He was having her educated there, and after she was educated—why, then, Maitland had at one time entertained his own projects or dreams. In the way of their accomplishment Dicky Shields had been felt as an obstacle: not that he objected,—on the other hand, he had made Maitland put his

views in writing. There were times—there had lately, above all, been times—when Maitland reflected uneasily on the conditional promises in this document. Dicky was not an eligible father-in-law, however good and pretty a girl his daughter might be. But now Dicky had ceased to be an obstacle: he was no longer (as he certainly had been) in any man's way: he was nobody's enemy now, not even his own.

The vision of all these circumstances passed rapidly, like a sensation rather than a set of coherent thoughts, through Maitland's consciousness.

"Tell me everything you know of this wretched business," he said, rising and closing the door which led into the outer room.

"Well, sir, you have not been here for some weeks, or you would know that Dicky had found a friend lately,—an old shipmate, or petty-officer, he called him,—a sailor-man. Well to do, he seemed; the mate of a merchant vessel he might be. He had known Dicky, I think, long ago at sea, and he 'd bring him here 'to yarn with him,' he said, once or twice it might be in this room, but mainly in the parlour upstairs. He let old Dicky tattoo him a bit, up there, to put him in the way of earning an honest penny by his trade—a queer trade it was. Never more than a pint, or a glass of hot rum and water, would he give the old man. Most considerate and careful, sir, he ever was. Well, last night he brought him in about nine, and they sat rather late; and about twelve the sailor comes in, rubbing his eyes, and 'Good-night, mum,' sez he. 'My friend 's been gone for an hour. An early bird he is, and I 've been asleep by myself. If you please, I 'll just settle our little score. It 's the last for a long time, for I 'm bound to-morrow for the China Seas, eastward. Oh, mum, a sailor's life!' So he pays, changing a half-

sovereign, like a gentleman, and out he goes, and that 's the last I ever see o' poor Dicky Shields till he was brought in this afternoon, out of the snow-cart, cold and stiff, sir."

"And how do you suppose all this happened? How did Shields get *into* the cart?"

"Well, that 's just what they 've been wondering at, though the cart was handy and uncommon convenient for a man as 'ad too much, if 'ad he *'ad;* as believe it I cannot, seeing a glass of hot rum and water would not intoxicate a babe. May be he felt faint, and laid down a bit, and never wakened. But, Lord a mercy, what 's *that?*" screamed Mrs. Gullick, leaping to her feet in terror.

The latched door, which communicated with the staircase, had been burst open, and a small brown bear had rushed erect into the room, and, with a cry, had thrown itself on Mrs. Gullick's bosom.

"Well, if ever I *'ad* a fright!" that worthy lady exclaimed, turning towards the startled Maitland, and embracing at the same time the little animal in an affectionate clasp. "Well, if *ever* there was such a child as you, Lizer! What is the matter with you *now?*"

"Oh, mother," cried the bear, "I dreamed of that big Bird I saw on the roof, and I ran downstairs before I was 'alf awake, I was that horful frightened."

"Well, you just go upstairs again,—and here 's a sweet cake for you,—and you take this night-light," said Mrs. Gullick, producing the articles she mentioned, "and put it in the basin careful, and knock on the floor with the poker if you want me. If it wasn't for that bearskin Mr. Toopny was kind enough to let you keep, you 'd get your death o' cold, you would, running about in the night. And look 'ere, Lizer," she added, patting the child

affectionately on the shoulder, "do get that there Bird out o' your head. It 's just nothing but indigestion comes o' you and the other children,—himps they may well call you, and himps I 'm sure you are,—always wasting your screws on pastry and lemonade and raspberry vinegar. Just nothing but indigestion."

Thus admonished, the bear once more threw its arms, in a tight embrace, about Mrs. Gullick's neck; and then, without lavishing attention on Maitland, passed out of the door, and could be heard skipping upstairs.

"I 'm sure, sir, I ask your pardon," exclaimed poor Mrs. Gullick; "but Lizer's far from well just now, and she did have a scare last night, or else, which is more likely, her little inside (saving your presence) has been upset with a supper the Manager gave all them pantermime himps."

"But, Mrs. Gullick, why is she dressed like a bear?"

"She 's such a favourite with the Manager, sir, and the Property Man, and all of them at the *Hilarity*, you can't *think*, sir," said Mrs. Gullick, not in the least meaning to impugn Maitland's general capacity for abstract speculation. "A regular little genius that child is, though I says it as shouldn't. Ah, sir, she takes it from her poor father, sir." And Mrs. Gullick raised her apron to her eyes.

Now the late Mr. Gullick had been a clown, of considerable merit; but, like too many artists, he was addicted beyond measure to convivial enjoyment. Maitland had befriended him in his last days, and had appointed Mrs. Gullick (and a capital appointment it was) to look after his property when he became landlord of the *Hit or Miss*.

"What a gift, sir, that child always had! Why, when she was no more than four, I well remember

her going to fetch the beer, and her being a little late, and Gullick with the thirst on him, when she came in with the jug, he made a cuff at her, not to hurt her, and if the little thing didn't drop the jug, and take the knap! Lord, I thought Gullick would 'a died laughing, and him so thirsty too."

"Take the knap?" said Maitland, who imagined that "the knap" must be some malady incident to childhood.

"Oh, sir, it 's when one person cuffs at another on the stage, you know, and the other slaps his own hand, on the far side, to make the noise of a box on the ear: that 's what we call 'taking the knap' in the profession. And the beer was spilt, and the jug broken, and all,—Lizer was that clever! And this is her second season, just ended, as a nimp at the *Hilarity* pantermime; and they 're that good to her, they let her bring her bearskin home with her, what she wears, you know, sir, as the Little Bear in *The Three Bears*, don't you know, sir."

Maitland was acquainted with the legend of the Great Bear, the Middle Bear, and the Little Tiny Small Bear, and had even proved, in a learned paper, that the Three Bears were the Sun, the Moon, and the Multitude of Stars in the Aryan myth. But he had not seen the pantomime founded on the traditional narrative.

"But what was the child saying about a big Bird?" he asked. "What was it that frightened her?"

"Oh, sir, I think it was just tiredness, and may be, a little something hot at that supper last night; and, besides, seeing so many queer things in pantermimes might put notions in a child's head. But when she came home last night, a little late, Lizer was very strange. She vowed and swore she had seen a large Bird, far bigger than any common

bird, skim over the street. Then when I had put her to bed in the attic, down she flies, screaming she saw the Bird on the roof. I had hard work to get her to sleep. To-day I made her lay a-bed and wear her theatre pantermime bearskin, that fits her like another skin,—and she 'll be too big for it next year,—just to keep her warm in that cold garret. That 's all about it, sir. She 'll be well enough in a day or two, will Lizer."

"I am sure I hope she will, Mrs. Gullick," said Maitland; "and, as I am passing his way, I will ask Dr. Barton to call and see the little girl. Now I must go, and I think the less we say to anyone about Miss Shields, you know, the better. It will be very dreadful for her to learn about her father's death, and we must try to prevent her from hearing how it happened."

"Certainly, sir," said Mrs. Gullick, bobbing; "and being safe away at school, sir, we 'll hope she won't be told no more than she needn't know about it."

Maitland went forth into the thick night; a half-hearted London thaw was filling the shivering air with a damp brown fog.

He walked to the nearest telegraph office, and did not observe, in the raw darkness and in the confusion of his thoughts, that he was followed at no great distance by a man muffled up in a great-coat and a woollen comforter. The stranger almost shouldered against him, as he stood reading his telegram, and conscientiously docking off a word here and there to save threepence.

"From Robert Maitland to Miss Marlett.

"The Dovecot, Conisbeare,

"Tiverton.

"I come to-morrow, leaving by 10.30 train. Do not let Margaret see newspaper. Her father dead. Break news."

This telegram gave Maitland, in his excited state, more trouble to construct than might have been expected. We all know the wondrous badness of post-office pens or pencils, and how they tear or blot the paper when we are in a hurry; and Maitland felt hurried, though there was no need for haste. Meantime the man in the woollen comforter was buying stamps, and, finishing his bargain before the despatch was stamped and delivered, went out into the fog, and was no more seen.

CHAPTER IV.

Miss Marlett's.

GIRLS' schools are chilly places. The unfortunate victims, when you chance to meet them, mostly look but half alive, and dismally cold. Their noses (however charming these features may become in a year or two, or even may be in the holidays) appear somehow of a frosty temperature in the long dull months of school-time. The hands, too, of the fair pupils are apt to seem larger than common, inclined to blue in colour, and, generally, are suggestive of inadequate circulation. A tendency to get as near the fire as possible (to come within the frontiers of the hearth-rug is forbidden), and to cower beneath shawls, is also characteristic of joyous girlhood—school-girlhood, that is. In fact, one thinks of a girls' school as too frequently a spot where no one takes any lively exercise (for walking in a funereal procession is not exercise, or Mutes might

be athletes), and where there is apt to be a pervading impression of insufficient food, insufficient clothing, and general unsatisfied tedium.

Miss Marlett's Establishment for the Highest Education of Girls, more briefly known as "The Dovecot, Conisbeare," was no exception, on a particularly cold February day—the day after Dicky Shields was found dead,—to these pretty general rules. The Dovecot, before it became a girls' school, was no doubt a pleasant English home, where "the fires wass coot," as the Highlandman said. The red-brick house, with its lawn sloping down to the fields, all level with snow, stood at a little distance from the main road, at the end of a handsome avenue of Scotch pines. But the fires at Miss Marlett's were *not* good on this February morning. They never *were* good at the Dovecot. Miss Marlett was one of those people who, fortunately for themselves, and unfortunately for persons dwelling under their roofs, never feel cold, or never know what they feel. Therefore Miss Marlett never poked the fire, which, consequently used to grow black towards its early death, and was only revived, at dangerously long intervals, by the most minute doses of stimulant in the shape of rather damp small coals. Now, supplies of coal had run low at the Dovecot, for the very excellent reason that the roads were snowed up, and that convoys of the precious fuel were scarcely to be urged along the heavy ways.

This did not matter much to the equable temperature of Miss Marlett; but it did matter a great deal to her shivering pupils, three of whom were just speeding their morning toilette, by the light of one candle, at the pleasant hour of five minutes to seven on a frosty morning.

"Oh dear," said one maiden—Janey Harman

by name—whose blonde complexion should have been pink and white, but was mottled with alien and unbecoming hues, "*why* won't that old Cat let us have fires to dress by? Gracious, Margaret, how black your fingers are!"

"Yes; and I can't get them clean," said Margaret, holding up two very pretty dripping hands, and quoting, in mock heroic parody:

> "Ho, dogs of false Tarentum,
> Are not my *hands* washed white?"

"No talking in the bedrooms, young ladies," came a voice, accompanied by an icy draught, from the door, which was opened just enough to admit a fleeting vision of Miss Marlett's personal charms.

"I was only repeating my lay, Miss Marlett," replied the maiden thus rebuked, in a tone of injured innocence—

> "'Ho, dogs of false Tarentum,'"

—and the door closed again on Miss Marlett, who had not altogether the best of it in this affair of outposts, and could not help feeling as if "that Miss Shields" was laughing at her.

"Old Cat!" the young lady went on, in a subdued whisper. "But no wonder my hands were a little black, Janey. You forget that it's my week to be Stoker. Already, girls, by an early and unexpected movement, I have cut off some of the enemy's supplies."

So speaking, Miss Margaret Shields proudly displayed a small deposit of coals, stored, for secrecy, in the bottom of a clothes-basket.

"Gracious, Daisy, how clever! Well, you are something *like* a stoker," exclaimed the third girl, who by this time had finished dressing: "we shall have a blaze to-night."

Now, it must be said that at Miss Marlett's school, by an unusual and inconsistent concession to comfort and sanitary principles, the elder girls were allowed to have fires in their bedrooms at night, in winter. But seeing that these fires resembled the laughter of the wicked, inasmuch as they were brief-lived as the crackling of thorns under pots, the girls were driven to make predatory attacks on fuel wherever it could be found. Sometimes, one is sorry to say, they robbed each other's fireplaces, and concealed the coal in their pockets. But this conduct—resembling what is fabled of the natives of the Scilly Islands, that they "eke out a precarious livelihood by taking in each other's washing"—led to strife and bickering; so that the Stoker for the week (as the girl appointed to collect these supplies was called) had to infringe a little on the secret household stores of Miss Marlett. This week, as it happened, Margaret Shields was the Stoker, and she so bore herself in her high office as to extort the admiration of the very housemaids.

> "Even the ranks of Tusculum
> Could scarce forbear to cheer,"

if we may again quote the author who was at that time Miss Shields's favourite poet. Miss Shields had not studied Mr. Matthew Arnold, and was mercifully unaware that not to detect the "pinchbeck" in the *Lays* is the sign of a grovelling nature.

Before she was sent to Miss Marlett's, four years ere this date, Margaret Shields' instruction had been limited. "The best thing that could be said for it," as the old sporting prophet remarked of his own education, "was that it had been mainly eleemosynary." The Chelsea School Board fees could but rarely be extracted from old

Dicky Shields. But Robert Maitland, when still young in philanthropy, had seen the clever, merry, brown-eyed child at some school treat, or inspection, or other function; had covenanted in some sort with her shiftless parent; had rescued the child from the streets, and sent her as a pupil to Miss Marlett's. Like Mr. Day, the accomplished author of *Sandford and Merton*, and creator of the immortal Mr. Barlow, Robert Maitland had conceived the hope that he might have a girl educated up to his own intellectual standard, and made, or "ready-made," a helpmate meet for him. He was, in a more or less formal way, the guardian of Margaret Shields, and the ward might be expected (by anyone who did not know human nature any better) to blossom into the wife.

Maitland could "please himself," as people say; that is, in his choice of a partner he had no relations to please—no one but the elect young lady, who, after all, might not be "pleased" with alacrity.

Whether pleased or not, there could be no doubt that Margaret Shields was extremely pleasing. Beside her two shivering chamber-mates ("chamber-dekyns" they would have been called, in Oxford slang, four hundred years ago), Miss Shields looked quite brilliant, warm, and comfortable, even in the eager and the nipping air of Miss Marlett's shuddering establishment, and by the frosty light of a single candle. This young lady was tall and firmly fashioned; a nut-brown maid, with a ruddy glow on her cheeks, with glossy hair rolled up in a big tight knot, and with a smile (which knew when it was well off) always faithful to her lips. These features, it is superfluous to say in speaking of a heroine, "were rather too large for regular beauty." She was perfectly ready to face the enemy (in which light she

humorously regarded her mistress) when the loud cracked bell jangled at seven o'clock exactly, and the drowsy girls came trooping from the dormitories down into the wintry class-rooms.

Arithmetical diversions, in a cold chamber, were the intellectual treat which awaited Margaret and her companions. Arithmetic and slates! Does anyone remember—can anyone forget—how horribly distasteful a slate can be when the icy fingers of youth have to clasp that cold educational formation (Silurian, I believe), and to fumble with the greasy slate-pencil? With her Colenso in her lap, Margaret Shields grappled for some time with the mysteries of Tare and Tret. "Tare an' 'ouns, *I* call it," whispered Janey Harman, who had taken, in the holidays, a "course" of Lever's Irish novels. Margaret did not make very satisfactory progress with her commercial calculations. After hopelessly befogging herself, she turned to that portion of Colenso's engaging work which is most palpitating with actuality:

"If ten Surrey labourers, in mowing a field of forty acres, drink twenty-three quarts of beer, how much cider will thirteen Devonshire labourers consume in building a stone wall of thirteen roods four poles in length, and four feet six in height?"

This problem, also, proved too severe for Margaret's mathematical endowments, and (it is extraordinary how childish the very greatest girls can be) she was playing at "oughts and crosses" with Janey Harman when the arithmetic master came round. He sat down, not unwillingly, beside Miss Shields, erased, without comment, the sportive diagrams, and set himself vigorously to elucidate (by "the low cunning of algebra") the difficult sum from Colenso.

"You see, it is like *this*," he said, mumbling

rapidly, and scribbling a series of figures and letters which the pupil was expected to follow with intelligent interest. But the rapidity of the processes quite dazed Margaret: a result not unusual when the teacher understands his topic so well, and so much as a matter of course, that he cannot make allowance for the benighted darkness of the learner.

"Ninety-five firkins fourteen gallons three quarts. You see, it 's quite simple," said Mr. Cleghorn, the arithmetic master.

"Oh, thank you; I *see*," said Margaret, with the kind readiness of woman, who would profess to "see" the Secret of Hegel, or the inmost heart of the Binomial Theorem, or the nature of the duties of cover-point, or the latest hypothesis about the frieze of the Parthenon, rather than be troubled with prolonged explanations, which the expositor, after all, might find it inconvenient to give.

Arithmetic and algebra were not this scholar's *forte;* and no young lady in Miss Marlett's establishment was so hungry, or so glad when eight o'clock struck and the bell rang for breakfast, as Margaret Shields.

Breakfast at Miss Marlett's was not a convivial meal. There was a long narrow table, with cross-tables at each end, these high seats, or *daïs*, being occupied by Miss Marlett and the governesses. At intervals down the table were stacked huge piles of bread and butter,—of extremely thick bread and surprisingly thin butter,—each slice being divided into four portions. The rest of the banquet consisted solely of tea. Whether this regimen was enough to support growing girls, who had risen at seven, till dinner-time at half-past one, is a problem which, perhaps, the inexperienced intellect of man can scarcely approach with confidence. But, if girls do not

always learn as much at school as could be desired, intellectually speaking, it is certain that they have every chance of acquiring Spartan habits, and of becoming accustomed (if familiarity really breeds contempt) to despise hunger and cold. Not that Miss Marlett's establishment was a *Do-the-girls Hall*, nor a school much more scantily equipped with luxuries than others. But the human race has still to learn that girls need good meals just as much as, or more than, persons of maturer years. Boys are no better off at many places; but boys have opportunities of adding bloaters and chops to their breakfasts, which would be considered horribly indelicate and insubordinate conduct in girls.

"Est ce que vous aimez les tartines à l'Anglaise," said Janey Harman to Margaret.

"Ce que j'aime dans la tartine, c'est la simplicité primesautière de sa nature," answered Miss Shields.

It was one of the charms of the "matinal meal" (as the author of *Guy Livingstone* calls breakfast) that the young ladies were all compelled to talk French (and such French!) during this period of refreshment.

"Toutes choses, la cuisine exceptée, sont Françaises, dans cet etablissement peu recréatif," went on Janey, speaking low and fast.

"Je déteste le Français," Margaret answered, "mais je le préfère infiniment à l'Allemand."

"Comment accentuez, vous le mot préfère, Marguerite?" asked Miss Marlett, who had heard the word, and who neglected no chance of conveying instruction.

"Oh, two accents—one this way, and the other that," answered Margaret, caught unawares. She certainly did not reply in the most correct terminology.

"Vous allez perdre dix marks," remarked the schoolmistress, if incorrectly, perhaps not too severely. But perhaps it is not easy to say, off-hand, what word Miss Marlett ought to have employed for "marks."

"Voici les lettres qui arrivent," whispered Janey to Margaret, as the post-bag was brought in and deposited before Miss Marlett, who opened it with a key and withdrew the contents.

This was a trying moment for the young ladies. Miss Marlett first sorted out all the letters for the girls, which came, indubitably and unmistakably, from fathers and mothers. Then she picked out the other letters, those directed to young ladies whom she thought she could trust, and handed them over in honourable silence. These maidens were regarded with envy by the others. Among them was not Miss Harman, whose letters Miss Marlett always deliberately opened and read before delivering them.

"Il y a une lettre pour moi, et elle va la lire," said poor Janey to her friend, who, for her part, never received any letters, save a few, at stated intervals, from Maitland. These Miss Shields used to carry about in her pocket without opening them, till they were all crumply at the edges. Then she hastily mastered their contents, and made answer in the briefest and most decorous manner.

"Qui est votre correspondent?" Margaret asked. We are not defending her French.

"C'est le pauvre Harry Wyville," answered Janey. "Il est sous-lieutenant dans les Berkshires, à Aldershot. Pourquoi ne doit il pas écrire à moi, il est comme on diroit, mon frère."

"Est il votre parent?"

"Non, pas du tout, mais je l'ai connu pour des ans. Oh, pour des ans! Voici, elle à deux dé-

pêches télégraphiques," Janey added, observing two orange-coloured envelopes which had come in the mail-bag with the letters.

At this moment Miss Marlett finished the fraternal epistle of Lieutenant Wyville, which she folded up with a frown and returned to the envelope.

"Jeanne, je veux vous parler à part, après, dans mon boudoir," remarked Miss Marlett severely; and Miss Harman, becoming a little blanched, displayed no further appetite for tartines, nor for French conversation.

Indeed, to see another, and a much older lady, read letters written to one by a lieutenant at Aldershot, whom one has known for years, and who is just like one's brother, is a trial to any girl.

Then Miss Marlett betook herself to her own correspondence, which, as Janey had noticed, included *two* telegraphic despatches in orange-coloured envelopes.

That she had not rushed at these, and opened them first, proves the admirable rigidity of her discipline. Any other woman would have done so, but it was Miss Marlett's rule to dispose of the pupils' correspondence before attending to her own. "Business first, pleasure afterwards," was the motto of this admirable woman.

Breakfast ended, as the girls were leaving the room for the tasks of the day, Miss Marlett beckoned Margaret aside.

"Come to me, dear, in the boudoir, after Janey Harman," said the schoolmistress in English, and in a tone to which Margaret was so unaccustomed that she felt painfully uneasy and anxious, unwonted moods for this careless maiden.

"Janey, something must have happened," she whispered to her friend, who was hardening her own heart for the dreadful interview.

"Something's *going* to happen, I'm sure," said poor Janey, apprehensively, and then she entered the august presence, alone.

Margaret remained at the further end of the passage, leading to what Miss Marlett, when she spoke French, called her "boudoir." The girl felt colder than even the weather warranted. She looked alternately at Miss Marlett's door and out of the window, across the dead blank flats to the low white hills far away. Just under the window one of the little girls was standing, throwing crumbs, remains of the tartines, to robins and sparrows, which chattered and fought over the spoil. One or two blackbirds, with their yellow bills, fluttered shyly on the outside of the ring of more familiar birds. Up from the south a miserable blue-grey haze was drifting and shuddering, ominous of a thaw. From the eaves and the branches of the trees heavy drops kept falling, making round black holes in the snow, and mixing and melting here and there in a yellowish plash.

Margaret shivered. Then she heard the boudoir door open, and Janey came out, making a plucky attempt not to cry.

"What is it?" whispered Margaret, forgetting the dread interview before her, and her own unformed misgivings.

"She won't give me the letter. I'm to have it when I go home for good; and I'm to go home for good at the holidays," whimpered Janey.

"Poor Janey!" said Margaret, petting the blonde head on her shoulder.

"Margaret Shields, come here!" cried Miss Marlett, in a shaky voice, from the boudoir.

"Come to the back music-room when she's done with you," the other girl whispered. And Margaret marched, with a beating heart, into Miss Marlett's chamber.

"My dear Margaret!" said Miss Marlett, holding out her hands. She was standing up in the middle of the boudoir. She ought to have been sitting grimly, fortified behind her bureau: that was the position in which she generally received pupils on these gloomy occasions.

"My dear Margaret!" she repeated. The girl trembled a little as the schoolmistress drew her closer, and made her sit down on a sofa.

"What has happened?" she asked. Her lips were so dry that she could scarcely speak.

"You must make up your mind to be very brave. Your father——"

"Was it an accident?" asked Margaret, suddenly. She knew pretty well what was coming. Often she had foreseen the end, which it needed no prophet to foretell. "Was it anything very dreadful?"

"Mr. Maitland does not say. You are to be called for to-day. Poor Daisy!"

"Oh, Miss Marlett, I am so very unhappy!" the girl sobbed. Somehow, she was kneeling now, with her head buried in the elder lady's lap. "I have been horrid to you. I am so wretched!"

A little kindness and a sudden trouble had broken down Miss Margaret Shields. For years she had been living, like Dr. Johnson at college, with a sad and hungry heart, trying to "carry it off by her wild talk and her wit." "It was bitterness they mistook for frolic." She had known herself to be a kind of outcast, and she determined to hold her own with the other girls, who had homes, and went to them in the holidays. Margaret had not gone home for a year. She had learned much, working harder than they knew; she had been in "the best set" among the pupils, by dint of her cheery rebelliousness. Now she suddenly felt all her loneliness, and knew, too, that

she had been living, socially, in that little society at the expense of this kind queer old Miss Marlett's feelings.

"I have been horrid to you," she repeated. "I wish I had never been born."

The schoolmistress said nothing at all, but kept stroking the girl's beautiful head. Surreptitiously Miss Marlett wiped away a frosty tear.

"Don't mind me," at last Miss Marlett said. "I never thought hardly of you: I understood. Now you must go and get ready for your journey; you can have any of the girls you like to help you to pack."

Miss Marlett carried generosity so far, that she did not even ask which of the girls was to be chosen for this service. Perhaps she guessed that it was the other culprit.

Then Margaret rose and dried her eyes, and Miss Marlett took her in her arms and kissed her, and went off to order a travelling luncheon and to select the warmest railway rug she could find; for the teacher, though she was not a very learned nor judicious schoolmistress, had a heart and affections of her own. She had once, it is true, taken the word *legibus* (dative plural of *lex*, a law) for an adjective of the third declension, *legibus*, *legiba*, *legibum;* and Margaret had criticised this grammatical subtlety with as unsparing philological acumen as if she had been Prof. Moritz Haupt, and Miss Marlett,—Orelli. And this had led to the end of Latin lessons at the Dovecot, wherefore Margaret was honoured as a goddess by girls averse to studying the classic languages. But now Miss Marlett forgot these things, and all the other skirmishes of the past.

Margaret went wearily to her room, where she bathed her face with cold water: it could not be too cold for her. A certain numb forgetfulness

seemed to steep her mind while she was thus deadening her eyes again and again. She felt as if she never wished to raise her eyes from this chilling consolation. Then, when she thought she had got rid of all the traces of her trouble, she went cautiously to the back music-room. Janey was there, moping alone, drumming on the window-pane with her fingers.

"Come to my room, Janey," she said, beckoning.

Now to consort together in their bedrooms during school hours was forbidden to the girls.

"Why, we'll only get into another scrape," said Janey ruefully.

"No, come away; I've got leave for you. You're to help me to pack."

"To pack!" cried Janey. "Why, *you're* not expelled, are you? You've done nothing. You've not even had a perfectly harmless letter from a boy who is just like a brother to you and whom you've known for years."

Margaret only beckoned again and turned away, Janey following in silence and intense curiosity.

When they reached their room, where Margaret's portmanteau had already been placed, the girl began to put up such things as she would need for a short journey. She said nothing till she had finished, and then she sat down on a bed and told Janey what she had learned; and the pair "had a good cry," and comforted each other as well as they might.

"And what are you going to do?" asked Janey, when, as Homer says, "they had taken their fill of chilling lamentations."

"I don't know!"

"Have you no one else in all the world?"

"No one at all. My mother died when I was a little child, in Smyrna. Since then we have wandered all about: we were a long time in

Algiers, and we were at Marseilles, and then in London."

"But you have a guardian, haven't you?"

"Yes; he sent me here. And, of course, he's been very kind, and done everything for me; but he's quite a young man, not thirty, and he's so stupid, and so stiff, and thinks so much about Oxford, and talks so like a book. And he's so shy, and always seems to do everything, not because he likes it, but because he thinks he ought to. And, besides——"

But Margaret did not go further in her confessions, nor explain more lucidly why she had scant affection for Maitland of St. Gatien's.

"And had your poor father no other friends who could take care of you?" Janey asked.

"There was a gentleman who called now and then: I saw him twice. He had been an officer in father's ship, I think, or had known him long ago at sea. He found us out somehow in Chelsea. There was no one else at all."

"And you don't know any of your father's family?"

"No," said Margaret, wearily. "Oh, I have forgotten to pack up my prayer-book." And she took up a little worn volume in black morocco with silver clasps. "This was a book my father gave me," she said. "It has a name on it—my grandfather's, I suppose,—'Richard Johnson, Linkheaton. 1837.'" Then she put the book in a pocket of her travelling cloak.

"Your mother's father it may have belonged to," said Janey.

"I don't know," Margaret replied, looking out of the window.

"I hope you won't stay away long, dear," said Janey affectionately.

"But *you* are going too, you know," Margaret

answered, without much tact; and Janey, reminded of her private griefs, was about to break down, when the wheels of a carriage were heard labouring slowly up the snow-laden drive.

"Why, here's some one coming!" cried Janey, rushing to the window. "Two horses! and a gentleman all in furs. Oh, Margaret, this must be for you!"

CHAPTER V.

Flown.

MAITLAND'S reflections as, in performance of the promise he had telegraphed, he made his way to the Dovecot were deep and distracted. The newspapers with which he had littered the railway carriage were left unread: he had occupation enough in his own thoughts. Men are so made that they seldom hear even of a death without immediately considering its effects on their private interests. Now, the death of Richard Shields affected Maitland's purposes both favourably and unfavourably. He had for some time repented of the tacit engagement (tacit as far as the girl was concerned) which bound him to Margaret. For some time he had been dimly aware of quite novel emotions in his own heart, and of a new, rather painful, rather pleasant, kind of interest in another lady. Maitland, in fact, was becoming more human than he gave himself credit for, and a sign of his awakening nature was the blush with which he had greeted, some weeks before, Barton's casual criticism on Mrs. St. John Deloraine.

Without any well-defined ideas or hopes, Maitland had felt that his philanthropic entanglement—it was rather, he said to himself, an entanglement than an engagement—had become irksome to his fancy. Now that the unfortunate parent was out of the way, he felt that the daughter would not be more sorry than himself to revise the relations in which they stood to each other. Vanity might have prevented some men from seeing this; but Maitland had not vitality enough for a healthy conceit. A curious "aloofness" of nature permitted him to stand aside, and see himself much as a young lady was likely to see him. This disposition is rare, and not a source of happiness.

On the other hand, his future relations to Margaret formed a puzzle inextricable. He could not at all imagine how he was to dispose of so embarrassing a *protégée*. Margaret was becoming too much of a woman to be left much longer at school; and where was she to be disposed of?

"I might send her to Girton," he thought; and then, characteristically, he began to weigh in his mind the comparative educational merits of Girton and Somerville Hall. About one thing only was he certain: he must consult his college mentor, Bielby of St. Gatien's, as soon as might be. Too long had this Rasselas—occupied, like the famous Prince of Abyssinia, with *the choice of life*—neglected to resort to his academic Imlac. In the meantime he could only reflect that Margaret must remain as a pupil at Miss Marlett's. The moment would soon be arriving when some other home, and a chaperon instead of a schoolmistress, must be found for this peculiar object of philanthropy and outdoor relief.

Maitland was sorry he had not left town by the nine o'clock train. The early dusk began to gather, grey and damp; the train was late, having

made tardy progress through the half-melted snow. He had set out from Paddington by the half-past ten express, and a glance at the harsh and crabbed page of Bradshaw will prove to the most sceptical that Maitland could not reach Tiverton much before six. Half frozen, and in anything but a happy temper, he engaged a fly, and drove off, along heavy miserable roads, to the Dovecot.

Arriving at the closed and barred gates of that vestal establishment, Maitland's cabman "pulled, and pushed, and kicked, and knocked" for a considerable time, without manifest effect. Clearly the retainers of Miss Marlett had secured the position for the night, and expected no visitors, though Maitland knew that he ought to be expected. "The bandogs bayed and howled," as they did round the secret bower of the Lady of Branksome; and lights flitted about the windows. When a lantern at last came flickering up to the gate, the bearer of it stopped to challenge an apparently unlooked-for and unwelcome stranger.

"Who are you? What do you want?" said a female voice, in a strong Devonian accent.

"I want Miss Marlett," answered Maitland.

There was some hesitation. Then the porter appeared to reflect that a burglar would not arrive in a cab, and that a surreptitious lover would not ask for the schoolmistress.

The portals were at length unbarred and lugged apart over the gravel, and Maitland followed the cook (for she was no one less) and the candle up to the front door. He gave his card, and was ushered into the chamber reserved for interviews with parents and guardians. The drawing-room had the air and faint smell of a room very seldom occupied. All the chairs were so elegantly and cunningly constructed that they tilted up at inter-

vals, and threw out the unwary male who trusted himself to their hospitality. Their backs were decorated with antimacassars wrought with glass beads, and these, in the light of one dip, shone fitfully with a frosty lustre. On the round table in the middle were volumes of *The Mothers of England*, *The Grandmothers of the Bible*, Blair *On the Grave*, and *The Epic of Hades*, the latter copiously and appropriately illustrated. In addition to these cheerful volumes there were large tomes of lake and river scenery, with gilt edges and faded magenta bindings, shrouded from the garish light of day in drab paper covers.

The walls, of a very faint lilac tint, were hung with prize sketches, in water colours or in pencil, by young ladies who had left. In the former works of art, distant nature was represented as, on the whole, of a mauve hue, while the foreground was mainly composed of burnt-umber rocks, touched up with orange. The shadows in the pencil drawings had an agreeably brilliant polish, like that which, when conferred on fenders by Somebody's Patent Dome Blacklead, "increases the attractions of the fireside," according to the advertisements. Maitland knew all the blacklead caves, broad-hatted brigands, and pea-green trees. They were old acquaintances, and as he fidgeted about the room he became very impatient.

At last the door opened, and Miss Marlett appeared, rustling in silks, very stiff, and with an air of extreme astonishment.

"Mr. Maitland?" she said, in an interrogative tone.

"Didn't you expect me? Didn't you get my telegram?" asked Maitland.

It occurred to him that the storm might have injured the wires, that his message might never have arrived, and that he might be obliged to

explain everything, and break his bad news in person.

"Yes, certainly. I got *both* your telegrams. But why have you come here?"

"Why, to see Margaret Shields, of course, and consult you about her. But what do you mean by *both* my telegrams?"

Miss Marlett turned very pale, and sat down with unexpected suddenness.

"Oh, what will become of the poor girl?" she cried, "and what will become of *me?* It will get talked about. The parents will hear of it, and I am ruined."

The unfortunate lady passed her handkerchief over her eyes, to the extreme discomfiture of Maitland. He could not bear to see a woman cry; and that Miss Marlett should cry—Miss Marlett, the least melting, as he had fancied, of her sex—was a circumstance which entirely puzzled and greatly disconcerted him.

He remained silent, looking at a flower in the pattern of the carpet, for at least a minute.

"I came here to consult you, Miss Marlett, about what is to become of the poor girl; but I do not see how the parents of the other young ladies are concerned. Death is common to all; and Margaret's father, though his life was exposed to criticism, cannot be fairly censured because he has left it. And what do you mean, please, by receiving *both* my telegrams? I only sent *one*, to the effect that I would leave town by the 10.30 train, and come straight to you. There must be some mistake somewhere. Can I see Miss Shields?"

"See Miss Shields! Why, she's *gone!* She left this morning with your friend," said Miss Marlett, raising a face at once mournful and alarmed, and looking straight at her visitor.

"She 's *gone!* She left this morning with my friend!" repeated Maitland. He felt like a man in a dream.

"You said in your first telegram that you would come for her yourself, and in your second that you were detained, and that your friend and her father's friend, Mr. Lithgow, would call for her by the early train; so she went with *him*."

"My friend, Mr. Lithgow! I have no friend, Mr. Lithgow," cried Maitland; "and I sent no second telegram."

"Then who *did* send it, sir, if you please? For I will show you both telegrams," cried Miss Marlett, now on her defence; and rising, she left the room.

While Miss Marlett was absent, in search of the telegrams, Maitland had time to reflect on the unaccountable change in the situation. What had become of Margaret? Who had any conceivable interest in removing her from school at the very moment of her father's accidental death? And by what possible circumstances of accident or fraud could two messages from himself have arrived, when he was certain that he had only sent one? The records of somnambulism contain no story of a person who despatched telegrams while walking in his sleep. Then the notion occurred to Maitland that his original despatch, as he wrote it, might have been mislaid in the office, and that the imaginative clerk who lost it might have filled it up from memory, and, like the examinees in the poem, might

> "Have wrote it all by rote,
> And never wrote it right."

But the fluttering approach of such an hypothesis was dispersed by the recollection that Margaret had actually departed, and (what was worse) had gone off with "his friend, Mr. Lithgow." Clearly,

no amount of accident or mistake would account for the appearance of Mr. Lithgow, and the disappearance of Margaret.

It was characteristic of Maitland that within himself he did not greatly blame the schoolmistress. He had so little human nature—as he admitted, on the evidence of his old college tutor—that he was never able to see things absolutely and entirely from the point of view of his own interests. His own personality was not elevated enough to command the whole field of human conduct. He was always making allowances for people, and never felt able to believe himself absolutely in the right, and everyone else absolutely in the wrong. Had he owned a more full-blooded life, he would probably have lost his temper, and "spoken his mind," as the saying is, to poor Miss Marlett. She certainly should never have let Margaret go with a stranger, on the authority even of a telegram from the girl's guardian.

It struck Maitland, finally, that Miss Marlett was very slow about finding the despatches. She had been absent quite a quarter of an hour. At last she returned, pale and trembling, with a telegraphic despatch in her hand, but not alone. She was accompanied by a blonde and agitated young lady, in whom Maitland, having seen her before, might have recognised Miss Janey Harman. But he had no memory for faces, and merely bowed vaguely.

"This is Miss Harman, whom I think you have seen on other occasions," said Miss Marlett, trying to be calm.

Maitland bowed again, and wondered more than ever. It did occur to him, that the fewer people knew of so delicate a business the better for Margaret's sake.

"I have brought Miss Harman here, Mr. Mait-

land, partly because she is Miss Shields' greatest friend" (here Janey sobbed), "but chiefly because she can prove, to a certain extent, the truth of what I have told you."

"I never for a moment doubted it, Miss Marlett; but will you kindly let me compare the two telegrams? This is a most extraordinary affair, and we ought to lose no time in investigating it, and discovering its meaning. You and I are responsible, you know, to ourselves, if unfortunately to no one else, for Margaret's safety."

"But I haven't got the two telegrams!" exclaimed poor Miss Marlett, who could not live up to the stately tone of Maitland. "I haven't got them, or rather, I only have one of them, and I have hunted everywhere, high and low, for the other."

Then she offered Maitland a single despatch, and the flimsy pink paper fluttered in her shaking hand.

Maitland took it up and read aloud:

"Sent out at 7.45. Received 7.51.

"From ROBERT MAITLAND to Miss MARLETT.

"The Dovecot, Conisbeare,
"Tiverton.

"I come to-morrow, leaving by 10.30 train. Do not let Margaret see the newspaper. Her father dead. Break news."

"Why, that is my own telegram!" cried Maitland; "but what have you done with the other you said you received?"

"That is the very one I cannot find, though I had both on the escritoire in my own room this morning. I cannot believe any one would touch it. I did not lock them away, not expecting to have any use for them; but I am quite sure, the last time I saw them, they were lying there."

"This is very extraordinary," said Maitland. "You tell me, Miss Marlett, that you received two telegrams from me. On the strength of the later of the two you let your pupil go away with a person of whom you know nothing, and then you have not even the telegram to show me. How long an interval was there between the receipt of the two despatches?"

"I got them both at once," said poor trembling Miss Marlett, who felt the weakness of her case. "They were both sent up with the letters this morning. Were they not, Miss Harman?"

"Yes," said Janey; "I certainly saw two telegraphic envelopes lying among your letters at breakfast. I mentioned it to—to poor Margaret," she added, with a break in her voice.

"But why were the telegrams not delivered last night?" Maitland asked.

"I have left orders," Miss Marlett answered, "that only telegrams of instant importance are to be sent on at once. It costs twelve shillings, and parents and people are so tiresome, always telegraphing about nothing in particular, and costing a fortune. These telegrams *were* very important, of course; but nothing more could have been done about them if they had arrived last night, than if they came this morning. I have had a great deal of annoyance and expense," the schoolmistress added, "with telegrams that had to be paid for."

And here most people who live at a distance from telegraph offices, and are afflicted with careless friends whose touch on the wire is easy and light, will perhaps sympathise with Miss Marlett.

"You might at least have telegraphed back to ask me to confirm the instructions, when you read the second despatch," said Maitland.

He was beginning to take an argumentative interest in the strength of his own case. It was

certainly very strong, and the excuse for the schoolmistress was weak in proportion.

"But that would have been of no use, as it happens," Janey put in,—an unexpected and welcome ally to Miss Marlett,—"because you must have left Paddington long before the question could have reached you."

This was unanswerable, as a matter of fact; and Miss Marlett could not repress a grateful glance in the direction of her wayward pupil.

"Well," said Maitland, "it is all very provoking, and very serious. Can you remember at all how the second message ran, Miss Marlett?"

"Indeed, I know it off by heart; it was directed exactly like that in your hand, and was dated half an hour later. It ran: 'Plans altered. Margaret required in town. My friend and her father's, Mr. Lithgow, will call for her soon after mid-day.' I noticed there were just twenty words."

"And did you also notice the office from which the message was sent out?"

"No," said Miss Marlett, shaking her head with an effort at recollection. "I am afraid I did not notice."

"That is very unfortunate," said Maitland, walking vaguely up and down the room. "Do you think the telegram is absolutely lost?"

"I have looked everywhere, and asked all the maids."

"When did you see it last, for certain?"

"I laid both despatches on the desk in my room when I went out to make sure that Margaret had everything comfortable before she started."

"And where was this Mr. Lithgow then?"

"He was sitting over the fire in my room, trying to warm himself; he seemed very cold."

"Clearly, then, Mr. Lithgow is now in possession of the telegram, which he probably, or rather

certainly, sent himself. But how he came to know anything about the girl, or what possible motive he can have had——" muttered Maitland to himself. "She has never been in any place, Miss Marlett, since she came to you, where she could have made the man's acquaintance?"

"It is impossible to say whom girls may meet, and how they may manage it, Mr. Maitland," said Miss Marlett sadly; when Janey broke in:

"I 'm *sure* Margaret never met him here. She was not a girl to have such a secret, and she could not have acted a part so as to have taken me in. I saw him first, out of the window. Margaret was very unhappy; she had been crying. I said 'Here 's a gentleman in furs, Margaret; he must have come for you.' Then she looked out and said, 'It is not my guardian; it is the gentleman whom I saw twice with my father.'"

"What kind of a man was he to look at?"

"He was tall, and dark, and rather good-looking, with a slight black moustache. He had a fur collar that went up to his eyes almost, and he was not a young man. He was a gentleman," said Janey, who flattered herself that she recognised such persons as bear without reproach that grand old name—when she saw them.

"Would you know him again if you met him?"

"Anywhere," said Janey, "and I would know his voice."

"He wore mourning," said Miss Marlett, "and he told me he had known Margaret's father. I heard him say a few words to her, in a very kind way, about him. That seemed more comfort to Margaret than anything. 'He did not suffer at all, my dear,' he said. He spoke to her in that way, as an older man might."

"Why, how on earth could *he* know?" cried Maitland. "No one was present when her poor

father died. His body was found in a——," and Maitland paused rather awkwardly. There was, perhaps, no necessity for adding to the public information about the circumstances of Mr. Shields' decease. "He was overcome by the cold and snow, I mean, on the night of the great storm."

"I have always heard that the death of people made drowsy by snow and fatigue is as painless as sleep," said Miss Marlett with some tact.

"I suppose that is what the man must have meant," Maitland answered.

There was nothing more to be said on either side, and yet he lingered, trying to think over any circumstance which might lend a clue in the search for Margaret and of the mysterious Mr. Lithgow.

At last he said "Good-night," after making the superfluous remark that it would be as well to let everyone suppose that nothing unusual or unexpected had happened. In this view Miss Marlett entirely concurred, for excellent reasons of her own, and now she began to regret that she had taken Miss Harman into her counsels. But there was no help for it; and when Maitland rejoined his cabman (who had been refreshed by tea), a kind of informal treaty of peace was concluded between Janey and the schoolmistress. After all, it appeared to Miss Marlett (and correctly) that the epistle from the young officer whom Janey regarded as a brother was a natural and harmless communication. It chiefly contained accounts of contemporary regimental sports and pastimes, in which the writer had distinguished himself; and if it did end "Yours affectionately," there was nothing very terrible or inflammatory in that, all things considered. So the fair owner of the letter received it into her own keeping, only she was "never to do it again."

Miss Marlett did not ask Janey to say nothing about Margaret's inexplicable adventure. She believed that the girl would have sufficient sense and good feeling to hold her peace; and if she did not do so of her own accord, no vows would be likely to bind her. In this favourable estimate of her pupil's discretion Miss Marlett was not mistaken. Janey did not even give herself airs of mystery among the girls, which was an act of creditable self-denial. The rest of the school never doubted that, on the death of Miss Shields' father, she had been removed by one of her friends. As for Maitland, he was compelled to pass the night at Tiverton, revolving many memories. He had now the gravest reason for anxiety about the girl, of whom he was the only friend and protector, and who was, undeniably, the victim of some plot or conspiracy. Nothing more practical than seeking the advice of Bielby of St. Gatien's occurred to his perplexed imagination.

CHAPTER VI.

At St. Gatien's.

HE following day was spent by Maitland in travel, and in pushing such inquiries as suggested themselves to a mind not fertile in expedients. He was not wholly unacquainted with novels of adventure, and he based his conduct, as much as possible, on what he could remember in these "authorities." For example, he first went in search of the man who had driven the cab which

brought the mysterious Mr. Lithgow to flutter the Dovecot. So far, there was no difficulty. One of the cabdrivers who plied at the station perfectly remembered the gentleman in furs whom he had driven to the school. After waiting at the school till the young lady was ready, he had conveyed them back again to the station, and they took the up train. That was all *he* knew. The gentleman, if his opinion were asked, was "a scaly varmint." On inquiry, Maitland found that this wide moral generalisation was based on the limited *pour-boire* which Mr. Lithgow had presented to his charioteer. Had the gentleman any luggage? Yes, he had a portmanteau, which he left in the cloakroom, and took away with him on his return to town—not in the van, in the railway carriage. "What could he want with all that luggage?" Maitland wondered.

The next thing was, of course, to find the guard of the train which conveyed Margaret and her mysterious friend to Taunton. This official had seen the gentleman and the young lady get out at Taunton. They went on to London.

The unfortunate guardian of Margaret Shields was now obliged to start for Taunton, and thence pursue his way, and his inquiries, as far as Paddington. The position was extremely irksome to Maitland. Although, in novels, gentlemen often assume the *rôle* of the detective with apparent relish, Maitland was not cast by Nature for the part. He was too scrupulous and too shy. He detested asking guards, and porters, and stationmasters, and people in refreshment-rooms if they remembered having seen, yesterday, a gentleman in a fur coat travelling with a young lady, of whom he felt that he had to offer only a too suggestive description. The philanthropist could not but see that every one promptly constructed,

in imagination, a satisfactory little myth to account for all the circumstances—a myth in which Maitland played the unpopular part of the Avenging Brother or Injured Husband.

What other path, indeed, was open to conjecture? A gentleman in a fur coat, and a young lady of prepossessing appearance, are travelling alone together, one day, in a carriage marked "Engaged." Next day, another gentleman (not prepossessing and very nervous) appears on the same route, asking anxious questions about the wayfarer in the notable coat (bearskin, it seemed to have been) and about the interesting young lady. Clearly, the pair were the fond fugitives of Love; while the pursuer represented the less engaging interests of Property, of Law, and of the Family. All the romance and all the popular interest were manifestly on the other side, not on Maitland's side. Even his tips were received without enthusiasm.

Maitland felt these disadvantages keenly; and yet he had neither the time nor the power to explain matters. Even if he had told every one he met that he was really the young lady's guardian, and that the gentleman in the fur coat was (he had every reason to believe) a forger and a miscreant, he would not have been believed. His opinion would, not unjustly, have been looked on as distorted by what Mr. Herbert Spencer calls "the personal bias." He had therefore to put up with general distrust and brief discourteous replies.

There are many young ladies in the refreshment-bar at Swindon. There they gather, numerous and fair as the sea-nymphs—Doto, Proto, Doris and Panope, and beautiful Galatea. Of them Maitland sought to be instructed. But the young ladies were arch and uncommunicative, pretend-

ing that their attention was engaged in their hospitable duties. Soup it was their business to minister to travellers, not private information. They *had* seen the gentleman and lady. Very attentive to her he seemed. Yes, they were on the best terms: "very sweet on each other," one young lady averred, and then secured her retreat and concealed her blushes by ministering to the wants of a hungry and hurried public. All this was horribly disagreeable to Maitland.

Maitland finally reached Paddington, still asking questions. He had telegraphed the night before to inquire whether two persons answering to the oft-repeated description had been noticed at the terminus. He had received a reply in the negative before leaving Tiverton. Here, then, was a check. If the ticket-collector was to be credited, the objects of his search had reached Westbourne Park, where their tickets had been taken. There, however, all the evidence proved that they had not descended. Nobody had seen them alight. Yet, not a trace was to be found at Paddington of a gentleman in a fur coat, nor of any gentleman travelling alone with a young lady.

It was nearly nine o'clock when Maitland, puzzled, worn out, and disgusted, arrived in town. He did what he could in the way of interrogating the porters,—all to no purpose. In the crowd and bustle of passengers, who skirmish for their luggage under inadequate lights, no one remembered having seen either of the persons whom Maitland described. There remained the chance of finding out and cross-examining all the cab-drivers who had taken up passengers by the late trains the night before. But that business could not be transacted at the moment, nor perhaps by an amateur.

Maitland's time was limited indeed. He had been

obliged to get out at Westbourne Park and prosecute his inquisition there. Thence he drove to Paddington, and, with brief enough space for investigations that yielded nothing, he took his ticket by the 9.15 evening train for Oxford. His whole soul was set on consulting Bielby of St. Gatien's, whom, in his heart, Maitland could not but accuse of being at the bottom of all these unprecedented troubles. If Bielby had not driven him, as it were, out of Oxford, by urging him to acquire a wider knowledge of humanity, and to expand his character by intercourse with every variety of our fallen species, Maitland felt that he might now be vegetating in an existence peaceful, if not well satisfied. "Adventures are to the adventurous." It is a hard thing when they have to be achieved by a champion who is not adventurous at all. If he had not given up his own judgment to Bielby's, Maitland told himself, he never would have plunged into philanthropic enterprise, he never would have taken the *Hit or Miss*, he never would have been entangled in the fortunes of Margaret Shields, and he would not now be concerned with the death, in the snow, of a dissipated old wanderer, nor obliged to hunt down a runaway or kidnapped schoolgirl. Nor would he be suffering the keen and wearing anxiety of speculating on what had befallen Margaret.

His fancy suggested the most gloomy yet plausible solutions of the mystery of her disappearance. In spite of these reflections, Maitland's confidence in the sagacity of his old tutor was unshaken. Bielby had not been responsible for the details of the methods by which his pupil was trying to expand his character. Lastly, he reflected that if he had not taken Bielby's advice, and left Oxford, he never would have known Mrs. St. John Deloraine, the lady of his diffident desires.

So the time passed, the minutes flitting by, like the telegraph posts, in the dark, and Maitland reached the familiar Oxford Station. He jumped into a hansom, and said, "Gatien's." Past Worcester, up Carfax, down the High Street, they struggled through the snow; and at last Maitland got out and kicked at the College gate. The porter (it was nearly midnight) opened it with rather a scared face:

"Horful row on in quad, sir," he said. "The young gentlemen 'as a bonfire on, and they're a larking with the snow. Orful A they're a making, sir."

The agricultural operation thus indicated by the porter was being forwarded with great vigour. A number of young men, in every variety of garb (from ulsters to boating-coats), were energetically piling up a huge Alp of snow against the door of the Master's lodge. Meanwhile, another band had carried into the quad all the light tables and cane chairs from a lecture-room. Having arranged these in a graceful pyramidal form, they introduced some of the fire-lighters, called "devils" by the College servants, and set a match to the whole.

Maitland stood for a moment in doubt, looking, in the lurid glare, very like a magician who has raised an army of fiends, and cannot find work for them. He felt no disposition to interfere, though the venerable mass of St. Gatien's seemed in momentary peril, and the noise was enough to waken the dead, let alone the Bursar of Oriel. But Maitland was a non-resident Fellow, known only to the undergraduates, where he was known at all, as a "Radical," with any number of decorative epithets, according to the taste and fancy of the speaker. He did not think he could identify any of the rioters, and he was not certain that

they would not carry him to his room, and there screw him up, according to precedent. Maitland had too much sense of personal dignity to face the idea of owing his escape from his chambers to the resources of civilisation at the command of the college blacksmith. He therefore, after a moment of irresolution, stole off under a low-browed old doorway communicating with a queer black many-sided little quadrangle; for it is by no means necessary that a quadrangle should, in this least mathematical of universities, be quadrangular. Groping and stumbling his familiar way up the darkest of spiral staircases, Maitland missed his footing, and fell, with the whole weight of his body, against the door at which he had meant to knock. Over the door was painted, if anyone could have seen it, the name of

MR. BIELBY.

"Come in," said a gruff voice, as if the knocking had been done in the most conventional manner.

Maitland had come in by this time, and found the distinguished Mr. Bielby, Fellow of St. Gatien's, sitting by his fireside, attired in a grey shooting-coat, and busy with a book and a pipe. This gentleman had, on taking his degree, gone to town, and practised with singular success at the Chancery Bar. But on some sudden disgust or disappointment, he threw up his practice, returned to College, and there lived a retired life among his "brown Greek manuscripts." He was a man of the world, turned hermit, and the first of the kind whom Maitland had ever known. He had "coached" Maitland, though he usually took no pupils, and remained his friend and counsellor.

"How are you, Maitland?" said the student, without rising. "I thought, from the way in which you knocked, that you were some of the

young men, coming to 'draw me,' as I think they call it."

Mr. Bielby smiled as he spoke. He knew that the undergraduates were as likely to "draw" him as boys who hunt a hare are likely to draw a fierce old bear that "dwells among bones and blood."

Mr. Bielby's own environment, to be sure, was not of the grisly and mortuary character thus energetically described by the poet. His pipe was in his hand. His broad bald red face, ending in an auburn spade-shaped beard, wore the air of content. Around him were old books that had belonged to famous students of old — Scaliger, Meursius, Muretus,—and before him lay the proof-sheets of his long-deferred work, a new critical edition of *Demetrius of Scepsis*.

Looking at his friend, Maitland envied the learned calm of a man who had not contrived, in the task of developing his own human nature, to become involved, like his pupil, in a singular and deplorable conjuncture of circumstances.

"The men are making a terrible riot in quad," he said, answering the other's remark.

"Yes, yes," replied Bielby genially; "boys will be boys, and so will young men. I believe our Torpid has bumped Keble, and the event is being celebrated."

Here there came a terrific howl from without, and a crash of broken glass.

"There go some windows into their battels," said Mr. Bielby. "They will hear of this from the Provost. But what brings you here, Maitland, so unexpectedly? Very glad to see you, whatever it is."

"Well, sir," said Maitland, "I rather want to ask your advice on an important matter. The fact is, to begin at the beginning of a long story,

that some time ago I got, more or less, engaged to be married."

This was not a very ardent or lover-like announcement, but Bielby seemed gratified.

"Ah-ha," replied the tutor, with a humorous twinkle. "Happy to hear it. Indeed, I *had* heard a rumour, a whisper! A little bird, as they say, brought a hint of it,—δεξιὸς ὄρνις, I hope, Maitland, a happy omen! A pleasant woman of the world, one who can take her own part in Society, and your part too a little,—if you will let me say so,—is exactly what you need. I congratulate you very heartily. And are we likely to see the young lady in Oxford? Where is she just now?"

Maitland saw that the learned Bielby had indeed heard something, and not the right thing. He flushed all over as he thought of the truth, and of Mrs. St. John Deloraine.

"I 'm sure I wish I knew," said Maitland at last, beginning to find this consulting of the oracle a little difficult. "The fact is, that's just what I wanted to consult you about. I—I 'm afraid I 've lost all trace of the young lady."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the don, his face suddenly growing grave, while his voice had not yet lost its humorous tone. "She has not eloped? You don't mean to tell me she has run away from you?"

"I really don't know what to say," answered Maitland. "I 'm afraid she has been run away with, that she is the victim of some plot or conspiracy."

"You surely can't mean what you say" (and now the voice was gruffer than ever). "People don't plot and conspire nowadays, if ever they did, which probably they didn't! And who are the young lady's people? Why don't they look

after her? I had heard she was a widow, but she must have friends."

"She is not a widow—she is an orphan," said Maitland, blushing painfully. "I am her guardian in a kind of way."

"Why, the wrong stories have reached me altogether! I 'm sure I beg your pardon, but did you tell me her name?"

"Her name is Shields, Margaret Shields"—("Not the name I was told," muttered Bielby),—"and her father was a man who had been rather unsuccessful in life."

"What was his profession, what did he do?"

"He had been a sailor, I think," said the academic philanthropist; "but when I knew him he had left the sea, and was, in fact, as far as he was anything, a professional tattooer."

"What 's that?"

"He tattooed patterns on sailors and people of that class for a livelihood."

Bielby sat perfectly silent for a few minutes, and no one who saw him could doubt that his silence arose from a conscious want of words on a level with the situation.

"Has Miss—h'm, Spears—Shields? thank you: has she been an orphan long?" he asked at length. He was clearly trying to hope that the most undesirable prospective father-in-law described by Maitland had long been removed from the opportunity of forming his daughter's character.

"I only heard of his death yesterday," said Maitland.

"Was it sudden?"

"Why, yes. The fact is, he was a man of rather irregular habits, and he was discovered dead in one of the carts belonging to the Vestry of St. George's, Hanover Square."

"St. George's, Hanover Square, indeed!" said the don, and once more he relapsed, after a long whistle, into a significant silence. "Maitland," he said at last, "how did you come to be acquainted with these people? The father, as I understand, was a kind of artist; but you can't, surely, have met them in Society?"

"He came a good deal to my public-house, the *Hit or Miss*. I think I told you about it, sir, and you rather seemed to approve of it. The tavern in Chelsea, if you remember, where I was trying to do something for the riverside population, and to mix with them for their good, you know."

"Good-night!" growled Bielby, very abruptly, and with considerable determination in his tone. "I am rather busy this evening. I think you had better think no more about the young lady, and say nothing whatever about the matter to anyone. Good-night!"

So speaking, the hermit lighted his pipe, which, in the astonishment caused by Maitland's avowals, he had allowed to go out, and he applied himself to a large old silver tankard. He was a scholar of the Cambridge school, and drank beer. Maitland knew his friend and mentor too well to try to prolong the conversation, and withdrew to his bleak college room, where a timid fire was smoking and crackling among the wet faggots, with a feeling that he must steer his own course in this affair. It was clearly quite out of the path of Bielby's experience.

"And yet," thought Maitland, "if I had not taken his advice about trying to become more human, and taken that infernal public-house too, I never would have been in this hole."

All day Maitland had scarcely tasted anything that might reasonably be called food. "He had eaten; he had not dined," to adopt the distinction

of Brillat Savarin. He had been dependent on the gritty and flaccid hospitalities of refreshment-rooms, on the sandwich and the bun. Now he felt faint as well as weary; but, rummaging amidst his cupboards, he could find no provisions more tempting and nutritious than a box of potted shrimps, from the college stores, and a bottle of some Hungarian vintage sent by an advertising firm to the involuntary bailees of St. Gatien's. Maitland did not feel equal to tackling these delicacies.

He did not forget that he had neglected to answer a note, on philanthropic business, from Mrs. St. John Deloraine. Weary as he was, he took pleasure in replying at length, and left the letter out for his scout to post. Then, with a heavy headache, he tumbled into bed, where, for that matter, he went on tumbling and tossing during the greater part of the night. About five o'clock he fell into a sleep full of dreams, only to be wakened, at six, by the steam-whooper, or "devil," a sweet boon with which his philanthropy had helped to endow the reluctant and even recalcitrant University of Oxford.

"Instead of becoming human, I have only become humanitarian," Maitland seemed to hear his own thoughts whispering to himself in a nightmare. Through the slowly broadening winter dawn, in snatches of sleep that lasted, or seemed to last, five minutes at a time, Maitland felt the thought repeating itself, like some haunting refrain, with a feverish iteration.

CHAPTER VII.

After the Inquest.

TO be ill in college rooms, how miserable it is! Maitland's scout called him at half-past seven, with the invariable question, "Do you breakfast out, sir?" If a man were in the condemned cell, his scout (if in attendance) would probably arouse him on the morning of his execution with, "Do you breakfast out, sir?"

"No," said Maitland, in reply to the changeless inquiry; "in common room as usual. Pack my bag, I am going down by the 9.0 train."

Then he rose and tried to dress; but his head ached more than ever, his legs seemed to belong to some one else, and to be no subject of just complacency to their owner. He reeled as he strove to cross the room, then he struggled back into bed, where, feeling alternately hot and cold, he covered himself with his ulster, in addition to his blankets. Anywhere but in college, Maitland would, of course, have rung the bell, and called his servant; but in our conservative Universities, and especially in so reverend a pile as St. Gatien's, there was, naturally, no bell to ring. Maitland began to try to huddle himself into his great-coat, that he might crawl to the window and shout to Dakyns, his scout.

But at this moment there fell most gratefully on his ear the sound of a strenuous sniff, repeated at short intervals, in his sitting-room. Often had Maitland regretted the chronic cold and handker-

chiefless condition of his bedmaker; but now her sniff was welcome as music, much more so than that of two hunting horns which ambitious sportsmen were trying to blow in quad.

"Mrs. Trattles!" cried Maitland, and his own voice sounded faint in his ears. "Mrs. Trattles!"

The lady thus invoked answered with becoming modesty, punctuated by sniffs, from the other side of the door:

"Yes, sir; can I do anything for you, sir?"

"Call Dakyns, please," said Maitland, falling back on his pillow. "I don't feel very well."

Dakyns appeared in due course.

"Sorry to hear you 're ill, sir: you do look a little flushed. Hadn't I better send for Mr. Whalley, sir?"

Now, Mr. Whalley was the doctor whom Oxford, especially the younger generation, delighted to honour.

"No; I don't think you need. Bring me breakfast here. I think I 'll be able to start for town by the 11.58. And bring me my letters."

"Very well, sir," answered Dakyns.

Then with that fearless assumption of responsibility which always does an Englishman credit, he sent the college messenger in search of Mr. Whalley before he brought round Maitland's letters and his breakfast commons.

There were no letters bearing on the subject of Margaret's disappearance; if any such had been addressed to him, they would necessarily be, as Maitland remembered after his first feeling of disappointment, at his rooms in London. Neither Miss Marlett, if she had aught to communicate, nor any one else, could be expected to know that Maitland's first act would be to rush to Oxford and consult Bielby.

The guardian of Margaret turned with no suc-

cess to his breakfast commons: even tea appeared unwelcome and impossible.

Maitland felt very drowsy, dull, indifferent, when a knock came to his door, and Mr. Whalley entered. He could not remember having sent for him; but he felt that, as an invalid once said, "there was a pain somewhere in the room," and he was feebly pleased to see his physician.

"A very bad feverish cold," was the verdict, and Mr. Whalley would call again next day, till which time Maitland was forbidden to leave his room.

He drowsed through the day, disturbed by occasional howls from the quadrangle, where the men were snow-balling a little, and, later, by the scraping shovels of the navvies who had been sent in to remove the snow, and with it the efficient cause of nocturnal disorders in St. Gatien's.

So the time passed, Maitland not being quite conscious of its passage, and each hour putting Margaret Shields more and more beyond the reach of the very few people who were interested in her existence. Maitland's illness took a more severe form than Whalley had anticipated, and the lungs were affected. Bielby was informed of his state, and came to see him; but Maitland talked so wildly about the *Hit or Miss*, about the man in the bearskin coat, and other unintelligible matters, that the hermit soon withdrew to the more comprehensible fragments of *Demetrius of Scepsis*. He visited his old pupil daily, and behaved with real kindness; but the old implicit trust never revived with Maitland's returning health.

At last the fever abated. Maitland felt weak, yet perfectly conscious of what had passed, and doubly anxious about what was to be done, if there was, indeed, a chance of doing anything.

Men of his own standing had by this time become aware that he was in Oxford, and sick,

consequently there was always some one to look after him.

"Brown," said Maitland to a friend, on the fifth day after his illness began, "would you mind giving me my things? I 'll try to dress."

The experiment was so far successful that Maitland left the queer bare slit of a place called his bedroom (formed, like many Oxford bedrooms, by a partition added to the large single room of old times), and moved into the weirdly æsthetic study, decorated in the Early William Morris manner.

"Now will you howl for Dakyns, and make him have this telegram sent to the post? Awfully sorry to trouble you, but I can't howl yet for myself," whispered Maitland huskily, as he scribbled on a telegraph form.

"Delighted to howl for you," said Brown, and presently the wires were carrying a message to Barton in town. Maitland wanted to see him at once, on very pressing business. In a couple of hours there came a reply: Barton would be with Maitland by dinner-time.

The ghostly room, in the Early William Morris manner, looked cosy and even homelike when the lamp was lit, when the dusky blue curtains were drawn, and a monster of the deep—one of the famous Oxford soles, larger than you ever see them elsewhere—smoked between Maitland and Barton. Beside the latter stood a silver quart pot, full of "strong," a reminiscence of "the old coaching days," when Maitland had read with Barton for Greats. The invalid's toast and water wore an air of modest conviviality, and might have been mistaken for sherry by anyone who relied merely on such information as is furnished by the sense of sight. The wing of a partridge (the remainder of the brace fell to Barton's lot) was disposed of by the patient; and then, over the wine,

which he did not touch, and the walnuts, which he tried nervously to crack in his thin white hands, Maitland made confession and sought advice.

It was certainly much easier talking to Barton than to Bielby, for Barton knew so much already, especially about the *Hit or Miss;* but when it came to the story of the guardianship of Margaret, and the kind of prospective engagement to that young lady, Barton rose and began to walk about the room. But the old beams creaked under him in the weak places; and Barton, seeing how much he discomposed Maitland, sat down again, and steadied his nerves with a glass of the famous St. Gatien's port.

Then, when Maitland, in the orderly course of his narrative, came to the finding of poor Dick Shields' body in the snow-cart, Barton cried, "Why, you don't mean to say *that* was the man, the girl's father? By George, I can tell you something about *him!* At the inquest my partner, old Munby, made out——"

"Has there been an inquest already? Oh, of course there must have been," said Maitland, whose mind had run so much on Margaret's disappearance that he had given little of his thoughts (weak and inconsecutive enough of late) to the death of her father.

"Of course there has been an inquest. Have you not read the papers since you were ill?"

Now, Maitland had the common-room back numbers of the *Times* since the day of his return from Devonshire in his study at that very moment. But his reading, so far, had been limited to the "Agony Column" of the advertisements (where he half hoped to find some message), and to all the paragraphs headed "Strange Occurrence" and "Mysterious Disappearance." None of these had cast any light on the fortunes of Margaret.

"I have not seen anything about the inquest," he said. "What verdict did they bring in? The usual one, I suppose,—'Visitation,' and all that kind of thing, or 'Death from exposure while under the influence of alcoholic stimulants.'"

"That 's exactly what they made it," said Barton; "and I don't blame them; for the medical evidence my worthy partner gave left them no other choice. You can see what he said for yourself in the papers."

Barton had been turning over the file of the *Times*, and showed Maitland the brief record of the inquest and the verdict; matters so common that their chronicle might be, and perhaps is, kept stereotyped, with blanks for names and dates.

"A miserable end," said Maitland, when he had perused the paragraph. "And now I had better go on with my story. But what did you mean by saying you didn't 'blame' the coroner's jury?"

"Have you any more story? Is it not enough? I don't know that I should tell you: it is too horrid!"

"Don't keep anything from me, please," said Maitland, moving nervously. "I must know everything."

"Well," answered Barton, his voice sinking to a tone of reluctant horror,—"well, your poor friend was *murdered!* That 's what I meant when I said I did not blame the jury: they could have given no other verdict than they did on the evidence of my partner."

Murder! The very word has power to startle, as if the crime were a new thing, not as old (so all religions tell us) as the first brothers. As a meteoric stone falls on our planet, strange and unexplained, a waif of the universe, from a nameless system, so the horror of murder descends on us, when we meet it, with an alien dread, as of

an intrusion from some lost star, some wandering world that is Hell.

"Murdered!" cried Maitland. "Why, Barton, you must be dreaming! Who on earth could have murdered poor Shields? If ever there was a man who was no one's enemy but his own, that man was Shields! And he literally had nothing that anyone could have wanted to steal. I allowed him so much—a small sum—paid weekly, on Thursdays; and it was a Wednesday when he was—when he died. He could not have had a shilling at that moment in the world!"

"I am very sorry to have to repeat it, but murdered he was, all the same, and that by a very cunning and cautious villain—a man, I should say, of some education."

"But how could it possibly have been done? There's the evidence before you in the paper. There was not a trace of violence on him, and the circumstances, which were so characteristic of his ways, were more than enough to account for his death. The exposure, the cold, the mere sleeping in the snow,—it's well known to be fatal. Why," said Maitland, eagerly, "in a long walk home from shooting in winter, I have had to send back a beater for one of the keepers; and we found him quite asleep, in a snowdrift, under a hedge. He never would have wakened."

He was naturally anxious to refute the horrible conclusion which Barton had arrived at.

The young doctor only shook his head. His opinion was manifestly fixed.

"But how can you possibly know better than the jury," urged Maitland peevishly, "and the coroner, and the medical officer for the district, who were all convinced that his death was perfectly natural—that he got drunk, lost his way, lay down in the cart, and perished of exposure?

Why, you did not even hear the evidence. I can't make out," he went on, with the querulousness of an invalid, "why you should have come up just to talk such nonsense. The coroner and the jury are sure to have been right."

"Well, you see, it was not the coroner's business, nor the jury's business, to know better than the medical officer for the district, on whose evidence they relied. But it is *my* business; for the said officer is my partner, and, but for me, our business would be worth very little. He is about as ignorant and easy-going an excellent old fellow as ever let a life slip out of his hands."

"Then, if you knew so much, why didn't you keep him straight?"

"Well, as it happened, I was down in Surrey with my people, at a wedding, when the death occurred, and they made a rather supeficial examination of the deceased."

"Still, I see less than ever how you got a chance to form such an extraordinary and horrible opinion if you were not there, and had only this printed evidence," said Maitland, waving a sheet of the *Times*, "to go by; and *this* is dead against you. You 're too clever."

"But I made a proper and most careful examination myself, on my return to town, the day after the inquest," said Barton, "and I found evidence enough *for me*—never mind where—to put the matter beyond the reach of doubt. The man was *murdered*, and murdered, as I said, very deliberately, by someone who was not an ordinary ignorant scoundrel."

"Still, I don't see how you got a chance to make your examination," said Maitland; "the man would be buried as usual——"

"Excuse me. The unclaimed bodies of paupers

—and there was no one to claim *his*—are reserved, if needed——"

"I see—don't go on," said Maitland, turning rather pale, and falling back on his sofa, where he lay for a little with his eyes shut. "It is all the fault of this most unlucky illness of mine," he said presently. "In my absence, and as nobody knew where I was, there was naturally no one to claim the body. The kind of people who knew about him will take no trouble or risk in a case like that." He was silent again for a few moments; then, "What do *you* make out to have been the cause of death?" he asked.

"Well," said Barton slowly, "I don't much care to go into details which you may say I can hardly prove, and I don't want to distress you in your present state of health."

"Why don't you speak out! Was he poisoned? Did you detect arsenic or anything? He had been drinking with some one!"

"No; if, in a sense, he had been poisoned, there was literally nothing that could be detected by the most skilled analysis. But, my dear fellow, there are venoms that leave *no* internal trace. If I am right,—and I think I am,—he was destroyed by one of these. He had been a great traveller, had he not?"

"Yes," answered Maitland.

"Well, it is strange; the murderer must have been a great traveller also. He must have been among the Macoushi Indians of Guiana, and well acquainted with their arts. I know them too. I went there botanising."

"You won't be more explicit?"

"No," he said; "you must take it on my word, after all."

Maitland, if not convinced, was silent. He had knowledge enough of Barton, and of his healthy

and joyous nature, to be certain that his theory was no morbid delusion ; that he had good grounds for an opinion which, as he said, he could no longer prove—which was, indeed, now incapable of any proof. No one had seen the commission of the crime, and the crime was of such a nature, and so cunningly planned, that it could not possibly be otherwise brought home to the murderer.

Now Maitland, knowing the *Hit or Miss*, and the private room upstairs with the dormer windows, where the deed must have been done, if done at all, was certain that there could not possibly have been any eye-witness of the crime.

"What shall you do?" he asked, "or have you done anything in consequence of your discovery? Have you been to the police?"

"No," said Barton: "where was the use? How can I prove anything now? It is not as if poison had been used, that could be detected by analysis. Besides, I reflected that if I was right, the less fuss made, the more likely was the murderer to show his hand. Supposing he had a secret motive,—and he must have had,—he will act on that motive sooner or later. The quieter everything is kept, the more he feels certain he is safe, the sooner he will move in some way or other. Then, perhaps, there may be a chance of detecting him; but it 's an outside chance. Do you know anything of the dead man's past history?"

"Nothing, except that he was from the North, and had lived a wandering life."

"Well, we must wait and see. But there is his daughter, left under your care. What do you mean to do about *her?*"

The question brought Maitland back to his old perplexities, which were now so terribly increased and confused by what he had just been told.

"I was going to tell you, when you broke in

with this dreadful business. Things were bad before; now they are awful," said Maitland. "*His daughter has disappeared!* That was what I was coming to: that was the rest of my story. It was difficult and distressing enough before I knew what you tell me; now—great Heavens! what am I to do?"

He turned on the sofa, quite overcome. Barton put his hand encouragingly on his shoulder, and sat so for some minutes.

"Tell me all about it, old boy?" asked Barton, at length.

He was very much interested, and most anxious to aid his unfortunate friend. His presence, somehow, was full of help and comfort. Maitland no longer felt alone and friendless, as he had done after his consultation of Bielby. Thus encouraged, he told, as clearly and fully as possible, the tale of the disappearance of Margaret, and of his entire failure even to come upon her traces or those of her companion.

"And you have heard nothing since your illness?"

"Nothing to any purpose. What do you advise me to do?"

"There is only one thing certain, to my mind," said Barton. "The seafaring man with whom Shields was drinking on the last night of his life, and the gentleman in the fur travelling-coat who sent the telegram in your name and took away Margaret from Miss Marlett's, are in the same employment, or, by George, are probably the same person. Now, have you any kind of suspicion who they or he may be? or can you suggest any way of tracking him or them?"

"No," said Maitland; "my mind is a perfect blank on the subject. I never heard of the sailor till the woman at the *Hit or Miss* mentioned him, the night the body was found. And I never

heard of a friend of Shields', a friend who was a gentleman, till I went down to the school."

"Then all we can do at present is, *not* to set the police at work,—they would only prevent the man from showing,—but to find out whether any one answering to the description is 'wanted,' or is on their books, at Scotland Yard. Why are we not in Paris, where a man, whatever his social position might be, who was capable of that unusual form of crime, would certainly have his *dossier?* They order these things better in France."

"There is just one thing about him, at least about the man who was drinking with poor Shields on the night of his death. He was almost certainly tattooed with some marks or other. Indeed, I remember Mrs. Gullick—that 's the landlady of the *Hit or Miss*—saying that Shields had been occupied in tattooing him. He did a good deal in that way for sailors."

"By Jove," said Barton, "if any fellow understands tattooing, and the class of jail-birds who practise it, I do. It is a clue after a fashion; but, after all, many of them that go down to the sea in ships are tattooed, even when they are decent fellows; and besides, we seldom, in our stage of society, get a view of a fellow-creature with nothing on but these early decorative designs."

This was only too obvious, and rather damping to Maitland, who for a moment had been inclined to congratulate himself on his *flair* as a detective.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Jaffa Oranges.

"Letting *I dare not* wait upon *I would*."

F all fairy gifts, surely the most desirable in prospect, and the most embarrassing in practice, would be the magical telescope of Prince Ali, in the *Arabian Nights*. With his glass, it will be remembered, he could see whatever was happening on whatever part of the earth he chose, and, though absent, was always able to behold the face of his beloved. How often would one give Aladdin's Lamp, and Fortunatus' Purse, and the invisible Cap which was made of "a darkness that might be *felt*," to possess for one hour the Telescope of Fairyland!

Could Maitland and Barton have taken a peep through the tube, while they were pondering over the means of finding Margaret, their quest would have been aided, indeed, but they would scarcely have been reassured. Yet there was nothing very awful, nor squalid, nor alarming, as they might have expected, anticipated, and dreaded, in what the vision would have shown. Margaret was not in some foreign den of iniquity, nor, indeed, in a den at all. The tube enchanted would have revealed to them Margaret, not very far off, not in Siberia nor Teheran, but simply in Victoria Square, Pimlico, S.W. There, in a bedroom, not more than commonly dingy, on the drawing-room floor, with the rattling old green Venetian blinds drawn down, Margaret would have been displayed.

The testimony of a cloud of witnesses, in the form of phials and medical vessels, proved that she had for some time been an invalid. The pretty dusky red of health would have been seen to have faded from her cheeks, and the fun and daring had died out of her eyes. The cheeks were white and thin, the eyes were half-closed from sickness and fatigue, and Margaret, a while ago so ready of speech, did not even bestir herself to answer the question which a gentleman, who stood almost like a doctor, in an attitude of respectful inquiry, was putting as to her health.

He was a tall gentleman, dark, with a ripe kind of face, and full, red, sensitive, sensual lips, not without a trace of humour. Near the door, in a protesting kind of attitude, as if there against her will, was a remarkably handsome young person, attired plainly as a housekeeper, or upper-servant. The faces of some women appear to have been furnished by Nature, or informed by habit, with an aspect that seems to say (in fair members of the less educated classes), "I won't put up with none of them goings on." Such an expression this woman wears.

"I hope you feel better, my dear?" the dark gentleman asks again.

"She 's going on well enough," interrupted the woman with the beautiful dissatisfied face. "What with peaches and grapes from Covent Garden, and tonics as you might bathe in——"

"Heaven forbid!"

"She *ought* to get well," the dissatisfied woman continued, as if the invalid were obstinately bent on remaining ill.

"I was not speaking, at the moment, to you, Mrs. Darling," said the dark gentleman, with mockery in his politeness, "but to the young lady whom I have entrusted to your charge."

"A pretty trust!" the woman replied, with a sniff.

"Yes, as you kindly say, an extremely pretty trust. And now, Margaret, my dear——"

The fair woman walked to the window, and stared out of it with a trembling lip, and eyes that saw nothing.

"Now, Margaret, my dear, tell me for yourself, how do you feel?"

"You are very kind," answered the girl at last. "I am sure I am better. I am not very strong yet. I hope I shall get up soon."

"Is there anything you would like? Perhaps you are tired of peaches and grapes: may I send you some oranges?"

"Oh, thank you; you are very good. I am often thirsty when I waken, or rather when I leave off dreaming. I seem to dream, rather than sleep, just now."

"Poor girl!" said the dark gentleman, in a pitying voice. "And what do you dream?"

"There seems to be a dreadful quiet, smooth, white place," said the girl slowly, "where I am; and something I feel,—something, I don't know what,—drives me out of it. I cannot rest in it; and then I find myself on a dark plain, and a great black horror, a kind of blackness falling in drifts, like black snow in a wind, sweeps softly over me, till I feel mixed in the blackness; and there is always some one watching me, and chasing me in the dark,—some one I can't see. Then I slide into the smooth, white, horrible place again, and feel I *must* get away from it. Oh, I don't know which is worst! And they go and come all the while I 'm asleep, I suppose."

"I am waiting for the doctor to look in again; but all *I* can do is to get you some Jaffa oranges, nice large ones, myself. You will oblige me, Mrs.

Darling" (he turned to the housekeeper), "by placing them in Miss Burnside's room, and then, perhaps, she will find them refreshing when she wakes. Good-bye for the moment, Margaret."

The fair woman said nothing, and the dark gentleman walked into the street, where a hansom cab waited for him. "Covent Garden," he cried to the cabman.

We have not for some time seen, or rather we have for some time made believe not to recognise, the Hon. Thomas Cranley, whose acquaintance (a very compromising one) we achieved early in this narrative.

Mr. Cranley, "with his own substantial private purpose sun-clear before him" (as Mr. Carlyle would have said, in apologising for some more celebrated villain), had enticed Margaret from school. Nor had this been, to a person of his experience and resources, a feat of very great difficulty. When he had once learned, by the simplest and readiest means, the nature of Maitland's telegram to Miss Marlett, his course had been clear. The telegram which followed Maitland's, and in which Cranley used Maitland's name, had entirely deceived Miss Marlett as we have seen. By the most obvious ruses he had prevented Maitland from following his track to London. His housekeeper had entered the "Engaged" carriage at Westbourne Park, and shared, as far as the terminus, the compartment previously occupied by himself and Margaret alone. Between Westbourne Park and Paddington, he had packed the notable bearskin coat in his portmanteau. The consequence was, that at Paddington no one noticed a gentleman in a bearskin coat, travelling alone with a young lady. A gentleman in a light ulster, travelling with two ladies, by no means answered to the description

Maitland gave in his examination of the porters. They, moreover, had paid but a divided attention to Maitland's inquiries.

The success of Cranley's device was secured by its elementary simplicity. A gentleman who, for any reason, wishes to obliterate his trail, does wisely to wear some very notable, conspicuous, unmistakable garb at one point of his progress. He then becomes, in the minds of most who see him, "the man in the bearskin coat," or "the man in the jack-boots," or "the man with the white hat." His identity is practically merged in that of the coat, or the boots, or the hat; and when he slips out of them, he seems to leave his personality behind, or to pack it up in his portmanteau, or with his rugs. By acting on this principle (which only requires to be stated to win the assent of pure reason), Mr. Cranley had successfully lost himself and Margaret in London.

With Margaret his task had been less difficult than it looked. She recognised him as an acquaintance of her father's, and he represented to her that he had been an officer of the man-of-war in which her father had served; that he had lately encountered her father, and pitied his poverty,—in poor Shields, an irremediable condition. The father, so he declared, had spoken to him often and anxiously about Margaret, and with dislike and distrust about Maitland. According to Mr. Cranley, Shields' chief desire in life had been to see Margaret entirely freed from Maitland's guardianship. But he had been conscious that to take the girl away from school would be harmful to her prospects. Finally, with his latest breath, so Mr. Cranley declared, he had commended Margaret to his old officer, and had implored him to abstract her from the charge of the Fellow of St. Gatien's.

Margaret, as we know, did not entertain a very lively kindness for Maitland, nor had she ever heard her father speak of that unlucky young man with the respect which his kindness, his academic rank, and his position in society deserved. It must be remembered that, concerning the manner of her father's death, she had shrunk from asking questions. She knew it had been sudden; she inferred that it had not been reputable. Often had she dreaded for him one of the accidents against which Providence does not invariably protect the drunkard. Now the accident had arrived she was fain to be ignorant of the manner of it. Her new guardian, again, was obviously a gentleman: he treated her with perfect politeness and respect, and, from the evening of the day when she left school, she had been in the charge of that apparently correct chaperon, the handsome housekeeper with the disapproving countenance. Mr. Cranley had even given up to her his own rooms in Victoria Square, and had lodged elsewhere: his exact address Margaret did not know. The only really delicate point—Cranley's assumption of the name of "Mr. Lithgow"—he frankly confessed to her as soon as they were well out of the Dovecot. He represented that, for the fulfilment of her father's last wish, the ruse of the telegram and the assumed name had been necessary, though highly repugnant to the feelings of an officer and a gentleman. Poor Margaret had seen nothing of gentlemen, except as philanthropists, and (as we know) philanthropists permit themselves a license and discretion not customary in common society.

Finally, even had the girl's suspicions been awakened, her illness prevented her from too closely reviewing the situation. She was with her father's friend, an older man by far, and therefore

a more acceptable guardian than Maitland. She was fulfilling her father's wish, and hoped soon to be put in the way of independence, and of earning her own livelihood; and independence was Margaret's ideal.

Her father's friend, her own protector,—in that light she regarded Cranley, when she was well enough to think consecutively. There could be no more complete hallucination. Cranley was one of those egotists who do undoubtedly exist, but whose existence, when they are discovered, is a perpetual surprise even to the selfish race of men. In him the instinct of self-preservation (without which the race could not have endured for a week) had remained absolutely unmodified, as it is modified in the rest of us, by thousands of years of inherited social experience. Cranley's temper, in every juncture, was precisely that of the first human being who ever found himself and other human beings struggling in a flood for a floating log that will only support one of them. Everything must give way to his desire: he had literally never denied himself anything that he dared to take. As certainly as the stone, once tossed up, obeys the only law it knows, and falls back to earth, so surely Cranley would obtain what he desired (if it seemed safe), though a human life, or a human soul, stood between him and his purpose.

Now, Margaret stood, at this moment, between him and the aims on which his greed was desperately bent. It was, therefore, necessary that she should vanish; and to that end he had got her into his power. Cranley's original idea had been the obvious one of transporting the girl to the Continent, where, under the pretence that a suitable situation of some kind had been found for her, he would so arrange that England should

never see her more, and that her place among honest women should be lost for ever. But there were difficulties in the way of this tempting plan. For instance, the girl knew some French, and was no tame, unresisting fool; and then Margaret's illness had occurred, and had caused delay, and given time for reflection.

"After all," he thought, as he lit his cigar and examined his moustache in the mirror (kindly provided for that purpose in well-appointed hansoms),—"after all, it is only the dead who tell no tales, and make no inconvenient claims."

For after turning over in his brain the various safe and easy ways of "removing" an inconvenient person, one devilish scheme had flashed across a not uninstructed intellect—a scheme which appeared open to the smallest number of objections.

"She shall take a turn for the worse," he thought; "and the doctor will be an uncommonly clever man, and particularly well read in Criminal Jurisprudence, if he sees anything suspicious in it."

Thus pondering, this astute miscreant stopped at Covent Garden, dismissed his cab, and purchased a basket of very fine Jaffa oranges. He then hailed another cab, and drove with his parcel to the shop of an eminent firm of chemists, again dismissing his cab. In the shop he asked for a certain substance, which it may be as well not to name, and got what he wanted in a small phial, marked POISON. Mr. Cranley then called a third cab, gave the direction of a surgical instrument maker's (also eminent), and amused his leisure during the drive in removing the label from the bottle. At the surgical instrument maker's he complained of neuralgia, and purchased a hypodermic syringe for injecting morphine or some such anodyne into his arm. A fourth cab took him back to the house in Victoria Square, where

he let himself in with a key, entered the dining-room, and locked the door.

Nor was he satisfied with this precaution. After aimlessly moving chairs about for a few minutes, and prowling up and down the room, he paused and listened. What he heard induced him to stuff his pocket-handkerchief into the keyhole, and to lay the hearth-rug across the considerable chink which, as is usual, admitted a healthy draught under the bottom of the door. Then the Honourable Mr. Cranley drew down the blinds, and unpacked his various purchases.

He set them out on the table in order—the oranges, the phial, and the hypodermic syringe.

Then he carefully examined the oranges, chose half-a-dozen of the best, and laid the others on a large dessert plate in the dining-room cupboard. One orange he ate, and left the skin on a plate on the table, in company with a biscuit or two.

When all this had been arranged to his mind, Mr. Cranley chose another orange, filled a wine-glass with the liquid in the phial, and then drew off a quantity in the little syringe. Then he very delicately and carefully punctured the skin of one of the oranges, and injected into the fruit the contents of the syringe. This operation he elaborately completed in the case of each of the six chosen oranges, and then tenderly polished their coats with a portion of the skin of the fruit he had eaten. That portion of the skin he consumed to dust in the fire; and, observing that a strong odour remained in the room, he deliberately turned on the unlighted gas for a few minutes. After this he opened the window, sealed his own seal in red wax on paper a great many times, finally burning the collection, and lit a large cigar, which he smoked through with every appearance of enjoyment. While engaged on this portion of

his task, he helped himself frequently to sherry from the glass, first carefully rinsed, into which he had poured the liquid from the now unlabelled phial. Lastly he put the phial in his pocket with the little syringe, stored the six oranges, wrapped in delicate paper, within the basket, and closed the window.

Next he unlocked the door, and without opening it, remarked in a sweet voice:

"Now, Alice, you may come in!"

The handle turned, and the housekeeper entered.

"How is Miss Burnside?" he asked, in the same silvery accents. (He had told Margaret that she had better be known by that name, for the present at least.)

"She is asleep. I hope she may never waken. What do you want with her? Why are you keeping her in this house? What devil's brew have you been making that smells of gas and sherry and sealing-wax?"

"My dear girl," replied Mr. Cranley, "you put too many questions at once. As to your first pair of queries, my reasons for taking care of Miss Burnside are my own business, and do not concern you, as my housekeeper. As to the 'devil's brew,' which you indicate in a style worthy rather of the ages of Faith and of Alchemy, than of an epoch of positive science, did you never taste sherry and sealing-wax? If you did not, that is one of the very few alcoholic combinations in which you have never, to my knowledge, attempted experiments. Is there any other matter on which I can enlighten an intelligent and respectful curiosity?"

The fair woman's blue eyes and white face seemed to glitter with anger, like a baleful lightening.

"I don't understand your chaff," she said, with a few ornamental epithets, which, in moments

when she was deeply stirred, were apt to decorate her conversation.

"I grieve to be obscure," he answered; "*brevis esse laboro*, the old story. But, as you say Miss Burnside is sleeping, and as, when she wakens, she may be feverish, will you kindly carry these oranges and leave them on a plate by her bedside? They are Jaffa oranges: and finer fruit, Alice, my dear, I have seldom tasted! After that, go to Cavendish Square, and leave this note at the doctor's."

"Oh, nothing's too good for *her!*" growled the jealous woman, thinking of the fruit; to which he replied by offering her several of the oranges not used in his experiment.

Bearing these she withdrew, throwing a spiteful glance and leaving the door unshut, so that her master distinctly heard her open Margaret's door, come out again, and finally leave the house.

"Now, I'll give her a quarter of an hour to waken," said Mr. Cranley, and he took from his pocket a fresh copy of the *Times*. He glanced rather anxiously at the second column of the outer sheet. "Still advertising for him," he said to himself; and he then turned to the sporting news. His calmness was extraordinary, but natural in him; for the reaction of terror at the possible detection of his villainy had not yet come on. When he had read all that interested him in the *Times*, he looked hastily at his watch:

"Just twenty minutes gone," he said. "Time she wakened,—and tried those Jaffa oranges."

Then he rose, went upstairs stealthily, paused a moment opposite Margaret's door, and entered the drawing-room. Apparently he did not find any of the chairs in the dining-room comfortable enough; for he chose a large and heavy *fauteuil*, took it up in his arms, and began to carry it out.

In the passage, just opposite Margaret's chamber, he stumbled so heavily that he fell, and the weighty piece of furniture was dashed against the door of the sick-room, making a terrible noise. He picked it up, and retired silently to the dining-room.

"That would have wakened the dead," he whispered to himself, "and she is not dead—yet. She is certain to see the oranges, and take one of them, and then——"

The reflection did not seem to relieve him, as he sat, gnawing his moustache, in the chair he had brought down with him. Now the deed was being accomplished, even his craven heart awoke to a kind of criminal remorse. Now anxiety for the issue made him wish the act undone, or frustrated; now he asked himself if there were no more certain and less perilous way. So intent was his eagerness that a strange kind of lucidity possessed him. He felt as if he beheld and heard what was passing in the chamber of sickness, which he had made a chamber of Death.

She has wakened—she has looked round—she has seen the poisoned fruit—she has blessed him for his kindness in bringing it—she has tasted the oranges—she has turned to sleep again—and the unrelenting venom is at its work!

Oh, strange forces that are about us, all inevitably acting, each in his hour and his place, each fulfilling his law without turning aside to the right hand or to the left! The raindrop running down the pane, the star revolving round the sun of the furthest undiscoverable system, the grains of sand sliding from the grasp, the poison gnawing and burning the tissues,—each seems to move in his inevitable path, obedient to an unrelenting will. Innocence, youth, beauty,—that will spares them not. The rock falls at its hour, whoever is under it. The deadly drug slays, though it be

blended with the holy elements. It is a will that moves all things—*mens agitat molem;* and yet we can make that will a slave of our own, and turn this way and that the blind steadfast forces, to the accomplishment of our desires.

It was not, naturally, with those transcendental reflections that the intellect of Mr. Cranley was at this moment engaged. If he seemed actually to be present in Margaret's chamber, watching every movement and hearing every heart-beat of the girl he had doomed, his blue lips and livid face, from which he kept wiping the cold drops, did not therefore speak of late ruth, or the beginning of remorse.

It was entirely on his own security and chances of escaping detection that he was musing.

"Now it's done, it can't be undone," he said. "But is it so very safe, after all? The stuff is not beyond analysis, unluckily; but it's much more hard to detect this way, mixed with the orange juice, than any other way. And then there's all the horrid fuss afterwards. Even if there is not an inquest—as, of course, there won't be—they'll ask who the girl is, what the devil she was doing here. Perhaps they'll, some of them, recognise Alice: she has been too much before the public, confound her. It may not be very hard to lie through all these inquiries, perhaps."

And then he looked mechanically at his cold fingers, and bit his thumb-nail, and yawned.

"By gad! I wish I had not risked it," he said to himself; and his complexion was now of a curious faint blue, and his heart began to flutter painfully in a manner not strange in his experience. He sank back in his chair, with his hands all thrilling and pricking to the finger-tips. He took a large silver flask from his pocket, but he could scarcely unscrew the stopper, and had to manage

with his teeth. A long pull at the liquor restored him, and he began his round of reflections again.

"That French fellow who tried it this way in Scotland was found out," he said; "and——" He did not like, even in his mind, to add that the "French fellow," consequently, suffered the extreme penalty of the law. "But then he was a fool, and boasted beforehand, and bungled it infernally. Still, it's not absolutely safe: the other plan I thought of first was better. By gad! I wish I could be sure she had not taken the stuff. Perhaps she hasn't. Anyway, she must be asleep again now; and, besides, there are the other oranges to be substituted for those left in the room, if she *has* taken it. I *must* go and see. I don't like the job."

He filled his pockets with five unpoisoned oranges, and the skin of a sixth, and so crept upstairs. His situation was, perhaps, rather novel. With murder in his remorseless heart, he yet hoped against hope, out of his very poltroonery, that murder had not been done. At the girl's door he waited and listened, his face horribly agitated and shining wet. All was silent. His heart was sounding hoarsely within him, like a dry pump: he heard it, so noisy and so distinct that he almost feared it might waken the sleeper. If only, after all, she had not touched the fruit!

Then he took the door-handle in his clammy grasp: he had to cover it with a handkerchief to get a firm hold. He turned discreetly, and the door was pushed open in perfect stillness, except for that dreadful husky thumping of his own heart. At this moment the postman's hard knock at the door nearly made him cry out aloud. Then he entered: a dreadful visitor, had anyone seen him. She did not see him: she was asleep,

sound asleep: in the dirty brown twilight of a London winter day, he could make out that much. He did not dare draw close enough to observe her face minutely, or bend down and listen for her breath. And the oranges! Eagerly he looked at them. There were only five of them. Surely—no! a sixth had fallen on the floor, where it was lying. With a great sigh of relief he picked up all the six oranges, put them in his pockets, and, as shirkingly as he had come,—yet shaking his hand at the girl, and cursing his own cowardice under his breath,—he stole downstairs, opened the dining-room door, and advanced into the blind, empty dusk.

"Now I 'll settle with you!" came a voice out of the dimness; and the start wrought so wildly on his nerves, excited to the utmost degree as they were, that he gave an inarticulate cry of alarm and despair. Was he trapped, and by whom?

In a moment he saw whence the voice came. It was only Alice Darling, in bonnet and cloak, and with a face flushed with something more than anger, that stood before him.

Not much used to shame, he was yet ashamed of his own alarm, and tried to dissemble it. He sat down at a writing-table facing her, and merely observed:

"Now that you have returned, Alice, will you kindly bring lights? I want to read."

"What were you doing upstairs just now?" she snarled. "Why did you send me off to the doctor's, out of the way?"

"My good girl, I have again and again advised you to turn that invaluable curiosity of yours,—curiosity, a quality which Mr. Matthew Arnold so justly views with high esteem,—into wider and nobler channels. Disdain the merely personal; accept the calm facts of domestic life as you find

them; approach the broader and less irritating problems of Sociology (pardon the term) or Metaphysics."

It was cruel to see the enjoyment he got out of teasing this woman by an ironical jargon which mystified her into madness. This time he went too far. With an inarticulate snarl of passion, she lifted a knife that lay on the dining-room table and made for him. But this time, being prepared, he was not alarmed; nay, he seemed to take pleasure in the success of his plan of tormenting. The heavy escritoire at which he sat was a breastwork between him and the angry woman. He coolly opened a drawer, produced a revolver, and remarked:

"No; I did not ask for the carving-knife, Alice. I asked for lights; and you will be good enough to bring them. I am your master, you know, in every sense of the word; and you are aware that you had better both hold your tongue and keep your hands off me—and off drink. Fetch the lamp!"

She left the room cowed, like a beaten dog. She returned, set the lamp silently on the table, and was gone. Then he noticed a letter, which lay on the escritoire, and was addressed to him. It was a rather peculiar letter to look at, or rather the envelope was peculiar; for, though bordered with heavy black, it was stamped, where the seal should have been, with a strange device in gold and colours,—a brown bun, in a glory of gilt rays.

"Mrs. St. John Deloraine," he said, taking it up. "How in the world did *she* find me out? Well, she is indeed a friend that sticketh closer than a brother,—a deal closer than Surbiton, anyhow."

Lord Surbiton was the elder brother of Mr. Cranley, and bore the second title of the family.

"I don't suppose there is another woman in London," he thought to himself, "that has not heard all about the row at the Cockpit, and that would write to me."

Then he tore the chromatic splendours of the device on the envelope, and read the following epistle:

"*Early English Bunhouse,*

"*Chelsea, Friday.*

"My dear Mr. Cranley,

"Where are you hiding, or yachting, you wandering man? I can hear nothing of you from any one—nothing *good*, and you know I never believe anything *else*. Do come and see me, at the old Bunhouse here, and tell me about *yourself*"—("She *has* heard," he muttered)—"and help me in a little difficulty. Our housekeeper (you know we are strictly *blue ribbon*—a *cordon bleu*, *I* call her) has become engaged to a *plumber*, and she is leaving us. *Can* you recommend me another? I know how interested you are (in spite of your wicked jokes) in our little enterprise. And we also want a girl, to be under the housekeeper, and keep the accounts. Surely you will come to see me, whether you can advise me or not.

"Yours very truly,

"Mary St. John Deloraine."

"Idiot!" murmured Mr. Cranley as he finished reading this document; and then he added, "By Jove! it 's lucky, too. I 'll put these two infernal women off on *her*, and Alice will soon do for the girl, if she once gets at the drink. She 's dangerous, by Jove, when she has been drinking. Then the Law will do for Alice, and all will be plain sailing in smooth waters."

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. St. John Deloraine.

MRS. ST. JOHN DELORAINE, whose letter to Mr. Cranley we have been privileged to read, was no ordinary widow. As parts of her character and aspects of her conduct were not devoid of the kind of absurdity which is caused by virtues out of place, let it be said that a better, or kinder, or gentler, or merrier soul than that of Mrs. St. John Deloraine has seldom inhabited a very pleasing and pretty tenement of clay, and a house in Cheyne Walk.

The maiden name of this lady was by no means so euphonious as that which she had attained by marriage. Miss Widdicombe, of Chipping Carby, in the county of Somerset, was a very lively, good-hearted, and agreeable young woman; but she was by no means favourably looked on by the ladies of the County Families. Now, in the district around Chipping Carby, the County Families are very County indeed, few more so. There is in their demeanour a kind of *morgue* so funereal and mournful, that it inevitably reminds the observer (who is not County) of an edifice in Paris, designed by Méryon, and celebrated by Mr. Robert Browning. The County Families near Chipping Carby are far, far from gay, and what pleasure they do take, they take entirely in the society of their equals. So determined are they to drink delight of tennis with their peers, and with nobody else, that even the Clergy are excluded, *ex officio*,

and in their degrading capacity of ministers of Religion, from the County Lawn Tennis Club. As we all know how essential young curates fresh from college are to the very being of rural lawn tennis, no finer proof can be given of the inaccessibility of the County people around Chipping Carby, and of the sacrifices which they are prepared to make to their position.

Now, born in the very purple, and indubitably (despite his profession) one of the gentlest born of men, was, some seven years ago, a certain Mr. St. John Deloraine. He held the sacrosanct position of a squarson, being at once Squire and Parson of the parish of Little Wentley. At the head of the quaint old village street stands, mirrored in a moat, girdled by beautiful gardens, and shadowy with trees, the Manor House and Parsonage (for it is both in one) of Wentley Deloraine.

To this desirable home and opulent share of earth's good things did Mr. St. John Deloraine succeed in boyhood. He went to Oxford, he travelled a good deal, he was held in great favour and affection by the County matrons and the long-nosed young ladies of the County. Another, dwelling on such heights as he, might have become haughty; but there was in this young man a cheery naturalness and love of mirth which often drove him from the society of his equals, and took him into that of attorneys' daughters. Fate drew him one day to an archery meeting at Chipping Carby, and there he beheld Miss Widdicombe. With her he paced the level turf, her "points" he counted, and he found that she, at least, could appreciate his somewhat apt quotation from *Chastelard:*

"Pray heaven, we make good Ends."

Miss Widdicombe *did* make good "Ends."

She vanquished Mrs. Struggles, the veteran lady champion of the shaft and bow, a sportswoman who was now on the verge of sixty. Why are ladies who, almost professionally, "rejoice in arrows," like the Homeric Artemis—why are they nearly always so well stricken in years? Was Maid Marion forty at least, before her performances obtained for her a place in the well-known band of Hood, Tuck, Little John, and Co.?

This, however, is a digression. For our purpose it is enough that the contrast between Miss Widdicombe's vivacity and the deadly stolidity of the County Families, between her youth and the maturity of her vanquished competitors, entirely won the heart of Mr. St. John Deloraine. He saw —he loved her—he was laughed at—he proposed—he was accepted—and, oh, shame! the County had to accept, more or less, Miss Widdicombe, the attorney's daughter, as *châtelaine* (delightful word, and dear to the author of *Guy Livingstone*) of Wentley Deloraine.

When the early death of her husband threw Mrs. St. John Deloraine almost alone on the world (for her family had, naturally, been offended by her good fortune), she left the grey old squarsonage, and went to town. In London, Mrs. St. John Deloraine did not find people stiff. With a good name, an impulsive manner, a kind heart, a gentle tongue, and plenty of money, she was welcome almost everywhere, except at the big County dinners which the County people of her district give to each other when they come to town.

This lady, like many of us, had turned to charity and philanthropy in the earlier days of her bereavement; but, unlike most of us, her benevolence had not died out with the sharpest pangs of her sorrow. Never, surely, was there such a festive philanthropist as Mrs. St. John Deloraine. She

would go from a garden party to a mothers' meeting; she was great at taking children for a day in the country, and had the art of keeping them amused. She was on a dozen charitable committees, belonged to at least three clubs, at which gentlemen as well as ladies of fashion were eligible, and where music and minstrelsy enlivened the after-dinner hours.

So good and unsuspecting, unluckily, was Mrs. St. John Deloraine, that she made bosom friends for life, and contracted vows of eternal sympathy, wherever she went. At Aix, or on the Spanish frontier, she has been seen enjoying herself with acquaintances a little dubious, like Greek texts which, if not absolutely corrupt, yet stand greatly in need of explanation. It is needless to say that gentlemen of fortune, in the old sense,—that is, gentlemen in quest of a fortune,—pursued hotly or artfully after Mrs. St. John Deloraine. But as she never for a moment suspected their wiles, so these devices were entirely wasted on her, and her least warrantable admirers found that she insisted on accepting them as endowed with all the Christian virtues. Just as some amateurs of music are incapable of conceiving that there breathes a man who has no joy in popular concerts (we shall have popular conic sections next), so Mrs. St. John Deloraine persevered in crediting all she met with a passion for virtue. Their speech might bewray them as worldlings of the world, but she insisted on interpreting their talk as a kind of harmless levity, as a mere cynical mask assumed by a tender and pious nature. Thus no one ever combined a delight in good works, with a taste for good things, so successfully as Mrs. St. John Deloraine.

At this moment the lady's "favourite vanity," in the matter of good works, was *The Bunhouse*. This really serviceable, though quaint, institution

was not, in idea, quite unlike Maitland's enterprise of the philanthropic public-house, the *Hit or Miss*. In a slum of Chelsea there might have been observed a modest place of entertainment, in the coffee and bun line, with a highly elaborate Chelsea Bun painted on the sign. This piece of art, which gave its name to the establishment, was the work of one of Mrs. St. John Deloraine's friends, an artist of the highest promise, who fell an early victim to arrangements in haschisch and Irish whiskey. In spite of this ill-omened beginning, *The Bunhouse* did very useful work. It was a kind of unofficial club and home, not for Friendly Girls, nor the comparatively subdued and domesticated slavey of common life, but for the tameless tribes of young women of the metropolis. Those who disdain service, who turn up expressive features at sewing machines, and who decline to stand perpendicularly for fifteen hours a day in shops—all these young female outlaws, not professionally vicious, found in *The Bunhouse* a kind of charitable shelter and home.

They were amused, they were looked after, they were encouraged not to stand each other drinks, nor to rival the profanity of their brothers and fathers. "Places" were found for them, in the rare instances when they condescended to "piaces." Sometimes they breakfasted at *The Bunhouse*, sometimes went there to supper. Very often they came in a state of artificial cheerfulness, or ready for battle. Then there would arise such a disturbance as civilisation seldom sees. Not otherwise than when boys, having tied two cats by the tails, hang them over the handle of a door — they then spit, and shriek, and swear, fur flies, and the clamour goes up to Heaven: so did the street resound when the young patrons of *The Bunhouse* were in a warlike

humour. Then the stern housekeeper would intervene, and check these motions of their minds, *haec certamina tanta*, turning the more persistent combatants into the street. Next day Mrs. St. John Deloraine would come in her carriage, and try to be very severe, and then would weep a little, and all the girls would shed tears, all would have a good cry together, and finally the Lady Mother (Mrs. St. John Deloraine) would take a few of them for a drive in the Park. After that there would be peace for a while, and presently disturbances would come again.

For this establishment it was that Mrs. St. John Deloraine wanted a housekeeper and an assistant. The former housekeeper, as we have been told, had yielded to love, "which subdues the hearts of all female women, even of the prudent," according to Homer, and was going to share the home and bear the children of a plumber. With her usual invincible innocence, Mrs. St. John Deloraine had chosen to regard the Hon. Thomas Cranley as a kind good Christian in disguise, and to him she appealed in her need of a housekeeper and assistant.

No application could possibly have suited that gentleman better. *He* could give his own servant an excellent character; and if once she was left to herself, to her passions, and the society of Margaret, that young lady's earthly existence would shortly cease to embarrass Mr. Cranley. Probably there was not one other man among the motley herds of Mrs. St. John Deloraine's acquaintance who would have used her unsuspicious kindness as an instrument in a plot of any sort. But Mr. Cranley had (when there was no personal danger to be run) the courage of his character.

"Shall I go and lunch with her?" he asked himself as he twisted her note, with its characteristic black border and device of brown and gold.

"I haven't shown anywhere I was likely to meet any one I knew, not since—since I came back from Monte Carlo."

Even to himself he did not like to mention that affair of the Cockpit. The man in the story who boasted that he had committed every crime in the calendar, withdrew his large words when asked "if he had ever cheated at cards."

"Well," Mr. Cranley went on, "I don't know: I daresay it 's safe enough. She does know some of those Cockpit fellows; confound her, she knows all sorts of fellows. But none of them are likely to be up so early in the day—not up to luncheon anyhow. She says"—and he looked again at the note—"that she 'll be alone; but she won't. Every one she sees before lunch she asks to luncheon; every one she meets before dinner she asks to dinner. I wish I had her money: it would be simpler and safer by a very long way than this kind of business. There really seems no end to it when once you begin. However, here goes," said Mr. Cranley, sitting down to write a letter at the escritoire which had just served him as a bulwark and breastwork. "I 'll write and accept. Probably she 'll have no one with her, but some girl from Chipping Carby, or some missionary from the Solomon Islands who never heard of a heathen like me."

As a consequence of these reflections, Mr. Cranley arrived, when the clock was pointing to half-past one, at Mrs. St. John Deloraine's house in Cheyne Walk. He had scarcely entered the drawing-room before that lady, in a costume which agreeably became her pleasant English style of beauty, rushed into the room, tumbling over a favourite Dandie Dinmont terrier, and holding out both her hands.

The terrier howled, and Mrs. St. John Deloraine

had scarcely grasped the hand which Mr. Cranley extended with enthusiasm, when she knelt on the carpet and was consoling the Dandie.

"Love in which thy hound has part," quoted Mr. Cranley. And the lady, rising with her face becomingly flushed beneath her fuzzy brown hair, smiled, and did not remark the sneer.

"Thank you so much for coming, Mr. Cranley," she said; "and, as I have put off luncheon till two, *do* tell me that you know some one who will suit me for my dear *Bunhouse*. I know how much you have always been interested in our little project."

Mr. Cranley assured her that, by a remarkable coincidence, he knew the very kind of people she wanted. Alice he briefly described as a respectable woman of great strength of character, "of body too, I believe, which will not make her less fit for the position."

"No," said Mrs. St. John Deloraine, sadly; "the dear girls are sometimes a little tiresome. On Wednesday, Mrs. Carter, the housekeeper, you know, went to one of the exhibitions with her *fiancé*, and the girls broke all the windows and almost all the tea things."

"The woman whom I am happy to be able to recommend to you will not stand anything of that kind," answered Mr. Cranley. "She is quiet, but extremely firm, and has been accustomed to deal with a very desperate character. At one time, I mean, she was engaged as the attendant of a person of treacherous and ungovernable disposition."

This was true enough; and Mr. Cranley then began to give a more or less fanciful history of Margaret. She had been left in his charge by her father, an early acquaintance, a man who had known better days, but had bequeathed her

nothing, save an excellent schooling, and the desire to earn her own livelihood.

So far, he knew he was safe enough; for Margaret was the last girl to tell the real tale of her life, and her desire to avoid Maitland was strong enough to keep her silent, even had she not been naturally proud and indisposed to make confidences.

"There is only one thing I must ask," said Mr. Cranley, when he had quite persuaded the lady that Margaret would set a splendid example to her young friends. "How soon does your housekeeper leave you, and when do you need the services of the new comers?"

"Well, the plumber is rather in a hurry. He really is a good man, and I like him better for it, though it seems rather selfish of him to want to rob me of Joan. He is determined to be married before next Bank Holiday,—in a fortnight that is,—and then they will go on their honeymoon of three days to Yarmouth."

Mr. Cranley blessed the luck that had not made the plumber a yet more impetuous wooer.

"No laggard in love," he said, smiling. "Well, in a fortnight the two women will be quite ready for their new place. But I must ask you to remember that the younger is somewhat delicate, and has by no means recovered from the shock of her father's sudden death,—a very sad affair," added Mr. Cranley, in a sympathetic voice.

"Poor dear girl!" cried Mrs. St. John Deloraine, with the ready tears in her eyes; for this lady spontaneously acted on the injunction to weep with those who weep, and also laughed with those who laugh.

Mr. Cranley, who was beginning to feel hungry, led her thoughts off to the latest farce in which Mr. Toole had amused the town; and when Mrs.

St. John Deloraine had giggled till she wept again over her memories of this entertainment, she suddenly looked at her watch.

"Why, he 's very late," she said; "and yet it is not far to come from the *Hit or Miss*."

"From the *Hit or Miss!*" cried Mr. Cranley, much louder than he was aware.

"Yes; you may well wonder, if you don't know about it, that I should have asked a gentleman from a public-house to meet you. But you will be quite in love with him: he is such a very good young man. Not handsome, nor very amusing; but people think a great deal too much of amusingness now. He is very, very good, and spends almost all his time among the poor. He is a Fellow of his College at Oxford."

During this discourse Mr. Cranley was pretending to play with the terrier; but, stoop as he might, his face was livid, and he knew it.

"Did I tell you his name?" Mrs. St. John Deloraine ran on. "He is a——"

Here the door was opened, and the servant announced "Mr. Maitland."

When Mrs. St. John Deloraine had welcomed her new guest, she turned, and found that Mr. Cranley was looking out of the window.

His position was indeed agonising, and, in the circumstances, a stronger heart might have blenched at the encounter.

When Cranley last met Maitland, he had been the guest of that philanthropist, and he had gone from his table to swindle his fellow-revellers. What other things he had done—things in which Maitland was concerned—the reader knows, or at least suspects. But it was not these deeds which troubled Mr. Cranley, for these he knew were undetected. It was that affair of the Baccarat which unmanned him.

There was nothing for it but to face Maitland and the situation.

"Let me introduce you——" said Mrs. St. John Deloraine.

"There is no need," interrupted Maitland. "Mr. Cranley and I have known each other for some time. I don't think we have met," he added, looking at Cranley, "since you dined with me at the Olympic, and we are not likely to meet again, I 'm afraid; for to-morrow, as I have come to tell Mrs. St. John Deloraine, I go to Paris on business of importance."

Mr. Cranley breathed again: it was obvious that Maitland, living out of the world as he did, and concerned (as Cranley well knew him to be) with private affairs of an urgent character, had never been told of the trouble at the Cockpit, or had, in his absent fashion, never attended to what he might have heard with the hearing of the ear. As to Paris, he had the best reason for guessing why Maitland was bound thither, as he was the secret source of the information on which Maitland proposed to act.

At luncheon,—which, like the dinner described by the American guest, was "luscious and abundant,"—Mr. Cranley was more sparkling than the champagne, and made even Maitland laugh. He recounted little philanthropic misadventures of his own,—cases in which he had been humorously misled by the Captain Wraggs of this world, or beguiled by the authors of that polite correspondence—begging letters.

When luncheon was over, and when Maitland was obliged, reluctantly, to go (for he liked Mrs. St. John Deloraine's company very much), Cranley, who had determined to see him out, shook hands in a very cordial way with the Fellow of St. Gatien's.

"And when are we likely to meet again?" he asked.

"I really don't know," said Maitland. "I have business in Paris, and I cannot say how long I may be detained on the Continent."

"No more can I," said Mr. Cranley to himself; "but I hope you won't return in time to bother me with your blundering inquiries, if ever you have the luck to return at all."

But while he said this to himself, to Maitland he only wished a good voyage, and particularly recommended to him a comedy (and a *comédienne*) at the Palais Royal.

CHAPTER X.

Traps.

THE day before the encounter with Mr. Cranley at the house of the lady of *The Bunhouse*, Barton, when he came home from a round of professional visits, had found Maitland waiting in his chill, unlighted lodgings. Of late, Maitland had got into the habit of loitering there, discussing and discussing all the mysteries which made him feel that he was indeed "moving about in worlds not realised." Keen as was the interest which Barton took in the labyrinth of his friend's affairs, he now and again wearied of Maitland, and of a conversation that ever revolved round the same fixed but otherwise uncertain points.

"Hullo, Maitland; glad to see you," he observed, with some shade of hypocrisy. "Anything new to-day?"

"Yes," said Maitland; "I really do think I have a clue at last."

"Well, wait a bit till they bring the candles," said Barton, groaning as the bell-rope came away in his hands. "Bring lights, please, and tea, and stir up the fire, Jemima, my friend," he remarked, when the blackened but alert face of the little slavey appeared at the door.

"Yes, Dr. Barton, in a minute, sir," answered Jemima, who greatly admired the Doctor, and in ten minutes the dismal lodgings looked almost comfortable.

"Now for your clue, old man," exclaimed Barton, as he handed Maitland a cup of his peculiar mixture, very weak, with plenty of milk and no sugar. "Oh, Ariadne, what a boon that clue of yours has been to the detective mind! To think that, without the Minotaur, the police would probably never have hit on that invaluable expression, 'the police have a clue!'"

Maitland thought this was trifling with the subject.

"This advertisement," he said gravely, "appears to me undoubtedly to refer to the miscreant who carried off Margaret, poor girl."

"Does it, by Jove?" cried Barton, with some eagerness this time. "Let 's have a look at it,"

This was what he read aloud:

"Bearskin Coat.—The gentleman, travelling with a young lady, who, on Feb. 19th, left a Bearskin Coat at the Hôtel Alsace and Lorraine, Avenue de l'Opéra, Paris, is requested to remove it, or it will be sold to defray expenses. "Dupin."

"This *may* mean business," he said, "or it may not. In the first place, is there such a hotel in Paris as the 'Alsace et Lorraine,' and is M. Dupin the proprietor?"

"*That's* all right," said Maitland. "I went at once to the Club, and looked up the *Bottin*, the Paris Directory, don't you know."

"So far, so good; and yet I don't quite see what you can make of it. It does not come to much, you know, even if the owner of the coat is the man you want. And again, is he likely to have left such a very notable article of dress behind him in a hotel? Anyway, can't you send some detective fellow? Are you going over yourself in this awful weather?"

So Barton argued, but Maitland was not to be easily put off the hopeful scent.

"Why, don't you see," he exclaimed, "the people at the hôtel will at least be able to give one a fuller description of the man than anything we have yet. And they may have some idea of where he has gone to; and, at least, they will have noticed how he was treating Margaret, and that, of course, is what I am most anxious to learn. Again, he may have left other things besides the coat, or there may be documents in the pockets. I have read of such things happening."

"Yes, in *Le Crime de l'Opéra;* and a very good story, too," answered the incredulous Barton; "but I don't fancy that the villain of real life is quite so innocent and careless as the monster of fiction."

"Everyone knows that murderers are generally detected through some incredible piece of carelessness," said Maitland; "and why should this elaborate scoundrel be more fortunate than the rest? If he *did* leave the coat, he will scarcely care to go back for it; and I do not think the chance should be lost, even if it is a poor one. Besides, I 'm doing no good here, and I can do no harm there."

This was undeniably true; and though Barton muttered something about "a false scent," he no

longer attempted to turn Maitland from his purpose. He did, however, with some difficulty, prevent the Fellow of St. Gatien's from purchasing a blonde beard, one of those wigs which simulate baldness, and a pair of blue spectacles. In these disguises, Maitland argued, he would certainly avoid recognition, and so discomfit any mischief planned by the enemies of Margaret.

"Yes; but, on the other hand, you would look exactly like a German professor, and probably be taken for a spy of Bismarck's," said Barton.

And Maitland reluctantly gave up the idea of disguise. He retained, however, certain astute notions of his own about his plan of operations, and these, unfortunately, he did not communicate to his friend. The fact is, that the long dormant romance of Maitland's character was now thoroughly awake, and he began, unconsciously, to enjoy the adventure.

His enjoyment did not last very long. The usual troubles of a winter voyage, acting on a dilapidated digestive system, were not spared the guardian of Margaret. But everything—even a period of waiting at the Paris *salle d'attente*, and a struggle with the *cochers* at the station (who, for some reason, always decline to take a fare)—must come to an end at last. About dinner-time, Maitland was jolted through the glare of the Parisian streets, to the Avenue de l'Opéra. At the Hôtel Alsace et Lorraine he determined not to betray himself by too precipitate eagerness. In the first place, he wrote an assumed name in the hotel book, choosing, by an unlucky inspiration, the pseudonym of Buchanan. He then ordered dinner in the hotel, and, by way of propitiation, it was a much better dinner than usual that Maitland ordered. Bottles of the higher Bordeaux wines, reposing in beautiful baskets,

were brought at his command; for he was determined favourably to impress the people of the house.

His conduct in this matter was partly determined by the fact that, for the moment, the English were not popular in Paris.

In fact, as the French newspapers declared, with more truth than they suspected, "Paris was not the place for English people, especially for English women."

In these international circumstances, then, Maitland believed he showed the wisdom of the serpent when he ordered dinner in the fearless old fashion attributed by tradition to the Milords of the past. But he had reckoned without his appetite.

A consequence of sea-travel, neither uncommon nor alarming, is the putting away of all desire to eat and drink. As the waiter carried off the untouched *hors d'œuvres* (whereof Maitland only nibbled the delicious bread and butter); as he bore away the *huîtres*, undiminished in number; as the *bisque* proved too much for the guest of the evening; as he faltered over the soles, and failed to appreciate the cutlets; as he turned from the noblest *crûs* (including the widow's *crûs*, those of La Veuve Cliquot), and asked for *siphon* and *fine champagne*, the waiter's countenance assumed an air of owl-like sagacity. There was something wrong, the *garçon* felt sure, about a man who could order a dinner like Maitland's, and then decline to partake thereof. However, even in a Republican country, you can hardly arrest a man merely because his intentions are better than his appetite. The waiter, therefore, contented himself with assuming an imposing attitude, and whispering something to the hall porter.

The Fellow of St. Gatien's, having dined with

the Barmecide regardless of expense, went on (as he hoped) to ingratiate himself with the *concierge*. From that official he purchased two large cigars, which he did not dream of attempting to enjoy; and he then endeavoured to enter into conversation, selecting for a topic the state of the contemporary drama. What would Monsieur advise him to go to see? Where was Mlle. Jane Hading playing?

Having in this conversation broken the ice (and almost every rule of French grammar), Maitland began to lead up craftily to the great matter—the affair of the bearskin coat. Did many English use the hotel? Had any of his countrymen been there lately? He remembered that when he left England, a friend of his had asked him to inquire about an article of dress—a great-coat—which he had left somewhere, perhaps in a cab. Could Monsieur the Porter tell him where he ought to apply for news about the garment, a coat in *peau d'ours?*

On the mention of this raiment a clerkly-looking man, who had been loitering in the office of the *concierge*, moved to the neighbourhood of the door, where he occupied himself in study of a railway-map hanging on the wall.

The porter now was all smiles. But, certainly! Monsieur had fallen well in coming to him. Monsieur wanted a lost coat in skin of the bear? It had been lost by a compatriot of Monsieur's? Would Monsieur give himself the trouble to follow the porter to the room where lost baggage was kept?

Maitland, full of excitement, and of belief that he now really was on the trail, followed the porter, and the clerkly man (rather a liberty, thought Maitland) followed *him*.

The porter led them to a door marked "private," and they all three entered.

The clerkly-looking person now courteously motioned Maitland to take a chair.

The Englishman sat down in some surprise.

"Where," he asked, "was the bearskin coat?"

"Would Monsieur first deign to answer a few inquiries? Was the coat his own, or a friend's?"

"A friend's," said Maitland, and then, beginning to hesitate, admitted that the garment only belonged to "a man he knew something about."

"What is his name?" asked the clerkly man, who was taking notes.

His name, indeed! If Maitland only knew that! His French now began to grow worse and worse in proportion to his flurry.

Well, he explained, it was very unlucky, but he did not exactly remember the man's name. It was quite a common name. He had met him for the first time on board the steamer; but the man was going to Brussels, and, finding that Maitland was on his way to Paris, had asked him to make inquiries.

Here the clerkly person, laying down his notes, asked if English gentlemen usually spoke of persons whom they had just met for the first time on board the steamer as their friends?

Maitland, at this, lost his temper, and observed that, as they seemed disposed to give him more trouble than information, he would go and see the play.

Hereupon the clerkly person requested Monsieur to remember, in his deportment, what was due to Justice; and when Maitland rose, in a stately way, to leave the room, he also rose and stood in front of the door.

However little of human nature an Englishman may possess, he is rarely unmoved by this kind of treatment. Maitland took the man by the collar, *sans phrase*, and spun him round, amidst the hor-

rified clamour of the porter. But the man, without any passion, merely produced and displayed a card, containing a voucher that he belonged to the Secret Police, and calmly asked Maitland for "his papers."

Maitland had no papers. He had understood that passports were no longer required.

The detective assured him that passports "spoil nothing." Had Monsieur nothing stating his identity? Maitland, entirely forgetting that he had artfully entered his name as "Buchanan" on the hôtel book, produced his card, on the lower corner of which was printed, *St. Gatien's College*. This address puzzled the detective a good deal, while the change of name did not allay his suspicions, and he ended by requesting Maitland to accompany him into the presence of Justice. As there was no choice, Maitland obtained leave to put some linen in his travelling-bag, and was carried off to what we should call the nearest police-station. Here he was received in a chill bleak room by a formal man, wearing a decoration, who (after some private talk with the detective) asked Maitland to explain his whole conduct in the matter of the coat. In the first place the detective's notes on their conversation were read aloud, and it was shown that Maitland had given a false name; had originally spoken of the object of his quest as "the coat of a friend;" then as "the coat of a man whom he knew something about;" then as "the coat of a man whose name he did not know;" and that, finally, he had attempted to go away without offering any satisfactory account of himself.

All this the philanthropist was constrained to admit; but he was, not unnaturally, quite unable to submit any explanation of his proceedings. What chiefly discomfited him was the fact that

his proceedings were a matter of interest and observation. Why, he kept wondering, was all this fuss made about a coat which had, or had not, been left by a traveller at the hôtel? It was perfectly plain that the hôtel was used as a *souricière*, as the police say, as a trap in which all inquirers after the coat could be captured. Now, if he had been given time (and a French dictionary), Maitland might have set before the Commissaire of Police the whole story of his troubles. He might have begun with the discovery of Shields' body in the snow; he might have gone on to Margaret's disappearance *(enlèvement)*, and to a description of the costume (bearskin coat and all) of the villain who had carried her away. Then he might have described his relations with Margaret, the necessity of finding her, the clue offered by the advertisement in the *Times*, and his own too subtle and ingenious attempt to follow up that clue. But it is improbable that this narrative, had Maitland told it ever so movingly, would have entirely satisfied the suspicions of the Commissaire of Police. It might even have prejudiced that official against Maitland. Moreover, the Fellow of St. Gatien's had neither the presence of mind nor the linguistic resources necessary to relate the whole plot and substance of this narrative, at a moment's notice, in a cold police-office, to a sceptical alien. He therefore fell back on a demand to be allowed to communicate with the English Ambassador; and that night Maitland of Gatien's passed, for the first time during his blameless career, in a police-cell.

It were superfluous to set down in detail all the humiliations endured by Maitland. Do not the newspapers continually ring with the laments of the British citizen who has fallen into the hands of Continental Justice? Are not our countrymen

the common butts of German, French, Spanish, and even Greek and Portuguese Jacks in office? When an Englishman appears, do not the foreign police usually arrest him at a venture, and inquire afterwards?

Maitland had, with the best intentions, done a good deal more than most of these innocents to deserve incarceration. His conduct, as the Juge d'Instruction told him, without mincing matters, was undeniably *loûche*.

In the first place, the suspicions of M. Dupin, of the Hôtel Alsace et Lorraine, had been very naturally excited by seeing the advertisement about the great-coat in the *Times*, for he made a study of "the journal of the City." Here was a notice purporting to be signed by himself, and referring to a bearskin coat, said (quite untruly) to have been left in his own hôtel. A bearskin coat! The very words breathe of Nihilism, dynamite, stratagems, and spoils. Then the advertisement was in English, which is, at present and till further notice, the language spoken by the brave Irish. M. Dupin, as a Liberal, had every sympathy with the brave Irish in their noble struggle for whatever they *are* struggling for; but he did not wish his hostelry to become, so to speak, the mountain cave of Freedom, and the secret storehouse of nitro-glycerine. With a view to elucidating the mystery of the advertisement, he had introduced the police on his premises, and the police had hardly settled down in its *affût*, when, lo! a stranger had been captured, in most suspicious circumstances. M. Dupin felt very clever indeed, and his friends envied him the distinction and advertisement which were soon to be his.

When Maitland appeared, as he did in due course, before the Juge d'Instruction, he attempted to fall back on the obsolete *Civis Romanus sum!*

He was an English citizen. He had written to the English Ambassador, or rather to an old St. Gatien's man, an *attaché* of the Embassy, whom he luckily happened to know. But this great ally chanced to be out of town, and his name availed Maitland nothing in his interview with the Juge d'Instruction. That magistrate, sitting with his back to the light, gazed at Maitland with steady small grey eyes, while the scribble of the pen of the *greffier*, as he took down the Englishman's deposition, sounded shrill in the bleak torture-chamber of the Law.

"Your name?" asked the Juge d'Instruction.

"Maitland," replied the Fellow of St. Gatien's.

"You lie!" said the Juge d'Instruction. "You entered the name of Buchanan in the book of the hotel."

"My name is on my cards, and on that letter," said Maitland, keeping his temper wonderfully.

The documents in question lay on a table, as *pièces justificatives*.

"These cards, that letter, you have robbed them from some unfortunate person, and have draped (*affublé*) yourself in the trappings of your victim! Where is his body?"

This was the working hypothesis which the Juge d'Instruction had formed within himself to account for the general conduct and proceedings of the person under examination.

"Where is *whose* body?" asked Maitland, in unspeakable surprise.

"Buchanan," said the Juge d'Instruction. (And to hear the gallantry with which he attacked this difficult name, of itself ensured respect.) "Buchanan, you are acting on a deplorable system. Justice is not deceived by your false-hoods, nor eluded by your subterfuges. She is calm, stern, but merciful. Unbosom yourself

freely" (*répandez franchement*), "and you may learn that Justice can be lenient. It is your interest to be frank." (*Il est de votre intérêt d'être franc.*)

"But what do you want me to say?" asked the *prévenu*. "What is all this pother about a great-coat?" (*Tant de fracas pour un paletôt?*)

Maitland was rather proud of this sentence.

"It is the part of Justice to ask questions, not to answer them," said the Juge d'Instruction. "Levity will avail you nothing. Tell me, Buchanan, why did you ask for the coat at the Hôtel Alsace et Lorraine?"

"In answer to that advertisement in the *Times*."

"That is false: you yourself inserted the advertisement. But, on your own system, bad as it is, what did you want with the coat?"

"It belonged to a man who had done me an ill-turn."

"His name?"

"I do not know his name: that is just what I wanted to find out. I might have found his tailor's name on the coat, and then have discovered for whom the coat was made."

"You are aware that the proprietor of the hotel did not insert the forged advertisement?"

"So he says."

"You doubt his word? You insult France in one of her citizens!"

Maitland apologised.

"Then whom do you suspect of inserting the advertisement, as you deny having done it yourself, for some purpose which does not appear?"

"I believe the owner of the coat put in the advertisement."

"That is absurd. What had he to gain by it?"

"To remove me from London, where he is probably conspiring against me at this moment."

"Buchanan, you trifle with Justice!"

"I have told you that my name is not Buchanan."

"Then why did you forge that name in the hôtel book?"

"I wrote it in the hurry and excitement of the moment: it was incorrect."

"Why did you lie?" *(Pourquoi avez vous menti?)*

Maitland made an irritable movement.

"You threaten Justice. Your attitude is deplorable. You are consigned *au secret*, and will have an opportunity of revising your situation, and replying more fully to the inquiries of Justice."

So ended Maitland's first and, happily, sole interview with a Juge d'Instruction. Lord Walter Brixton, his old St. Gatien's pupil, returned from the country on the very day of Maitland's examination. An interview (during which Lord Walter laughed unfeelingly) with his old coach was not refused to the *attaché*, and, in a few hours, after some formalities had been complied with, Maitland was a free man. His *pièces justificatives*, his letters, cards, and return ticket to Charing Cross were returned to him intact.

But Maitland determined to sacrifice the privileges of the last-named document.

"I am going straight to Constantinople and the Greek Islands," he wrote to Barton. "Do you know I don't like Paris? My attempt at an investigation has not been a success. I have endured considerable discomfort, and I fear my case will get into the *Figaro*, and there will be dozens of 'social leaders' and 'descriptive headers' about me in all the penny papers."

Then Maitland gave his banker's address at Constantinople, relinquished the quest of Margaret, and for a while, as the Sagas say, "is out of the story."

CHAPTER XI.

The Night of Adventures.

A COLD March wind whistled and yelled round the twisted chimneys of the *Hit or Miss*. The day had been a trial to every sense. First there would come a long-drawn distant moan, a sigh like that of a querulous woman; then the sigh grew nearer and became a shriek, as if the same woman were working herself up into a passion; and finally a gust of rainy hail, mixed with dust and small stones, was dashed, like a parting insult, on the windows of the *Hit or Miss*. Then the shriek died away again into a wail and a moan, and so *da capo*.

"Well, Eliza, what do you do now that the pantomime season is over?" said Barton to Miss Gullick, who was busily dressing a doll, as she perched on the table in the parlour of the *Hit or Miss*.

Barton occasionally looked into the public-house, partly to see that Maitland's investment was properly managed, partly because the place was near the scene of his labours; not least, perhaps, because he had still an unacknowledged hope that light on the mystery of Margaret would come from the original centre of the troubles.

"I'm in no hurry to take an engagement," answered the resolute Eliza, holding up and examining her doll. It was a fashionable doll, in a close-fitting tweed ulster, which covered a perfect panoply of other female furniture, all in the latest mode. As the child worked, she looked now and

then at the illustrations in a journal of the fashions. "There 's two or three managers in treaty with me," said Eliza. "There 's the *Follies and Frivolities* down Norwood way, and the *Varieties* in the 'Ammersmith Road. Thirty shillings a week and my dresses, that 's what I ask for, and I 'll get it too! Just now I 'm taking a vacation, and making an honest penny with these things," and she nodded at a little basket full of the wardrobe of dolls.

"Do you sell the dresses to the toy shops, Eliza?" asked Barton.

"Yes," said Eliza: "I am doing well with them. I 'm not sure I shan't need to take on some extra hands, by the job, to finish my Easter orders."

"I 'm glad you are successful," answered Barton. "I say, Eliza!"

"Yes, Doctor."

"Would you mind showing me the room upstairs where poor old Shields was sitting the night before he was found in the snow?"

It had suddenly occurred to Barton,—it might have occurred to him before,—that this room might be worth examining.

"We ain't using it now! I 'll show you it," said Eliza, leading the way upstairs, and pointing to a door.

Barton took hold of the handle.

"Ladies first," he said, making way for Eliza, with a bow.

"No," came the child's voice, from half-way down the stairs; "I won't come in! They say he walks. I 've heard noises there at night."

A cold stuffy smell came out of the darkness of the unused room. Barton struck a match, and seeing a candle on the table, lit it. The room had been left as it was when last it was tenanted. On the table were an empty bottle,

two tumblers, and a little saucer stained with dry colours, blue and red, part of Shields' stock-in-trade. There were, besides, some very sharp needles of bone, of a savage make, which Barton recognised. They were the instruments used for tattooing in the islands of the Southern Seas.

Barton placed the lighted candle beside the saucer, and turned over the needles. Presently his eyes brightened: he chose one out, and examined it closely. It was astonishingly sharp, and was not of bone like the others, but of wood.

Barton made an incision in the hard brittle wood with his knife, and carefully felt the point, which was slightly crusted with a dry brown substance.

"I thought so," he said aloud, as he placed the needle in a pocket instrument-case: "the stem of the leaf of the coucourite palm!"

Then he went downstairs with the candle.

"Did you see him?" asked Eliza, with wide-open eyes.

"Don't be childish, Eliza: there's no one to see. Why is the room left all untidy?"

"Mother dare not go in!" whispered the child. Then she asked in a low voice, "Did you never hear no more of that awful big Bird I saw the night old Shields died in the snow?"

"The Bird was a dream, Eliza. I am surprised such a clever girl as you should go on thinking about it," said Barton rather sternly. "You were tired and ill, and you fancied it."

"No, I wasn't," said the child, solemnly. "I never say no more about it to mother, nor to nobody; but I did see it, ay, and heard it too. I remember it at night in my bed, and I am afraid. Oh! what's that?"

She turned with a scream, in answer to a scream on the other side of the curtained door that separated the parlour from the bar of the *Hit or Miss*.

Some one seemed to fall against the door, which at the same moment flew open, as if the wind had burst it in. A girl, panting and holding her hand to her breast, her face deadly white and so contorted by terror as to be unrecognisable, flashed into the room. "Oh, come! oh, come!" she cried. "She 's killing her!" Then the girl vanished as hurriedly as she had appeared. It was all over in a moment: the vivid impression of a face maddened by fear, and of a cry for help, that was all. In that moment Barton had seized his hat, and sped as hard as he could run after the girl. He found her breaking through a knot of loafers in the bar, who were besieging her with questions. She turned and saw Barton.

"Come, doctor, come!" she screamed again, and fled out into the night, crossing another girl who was apparently speeding on the same errand. Barton could just see the flying skirts of the first messenger, and hear her footfall ring on the pavement. Up a long street, down another, and then into a back slum she flew, and, lastly, under a swinging sign of the old-fashioned sort, and through a doorway. Barton, following, found himself for the first time within the portals of *The Old English Bunhouse*.

The wide passage (the house was old) was crowded with girls, wildly excited, weeping, screaming, and some of them swearing. They were pressed so thick round a door at the end of the hall, that Barton could scarcely thrust his way through them, dragging one aside, shouldering another: it was a matter of life and death.

"Oh, she 's been at the drink, and she 's killed her! she 's killed her! I heard her fall!" one of the frightened girls was exclaiming with hysterical iteration.

"Let me pass!" shouted Barton; and reaching

the door at last, he turned the handle and pushed. The door was locked.

"Give me room," he cried, and the patrons of *The Bunhouse* yielding place a little, Barton took a short run, and drove with all the weight of his shoulders against the door. It opened reluctantly with a crash, and he was hurled into the room by his own impetus and by the stress of the girls behind him.

What he beheld was more like some dreadful scene of ancient tragedy, than the spectacle of an accident or a crime of modern life.

By the windy glare of a dozen gas jets (red and shaken like the flame of blown torches by the rainy gusts that swept through a broken pane) Barton saw a girl stretched bleeding on the sanded floor.

One of her arms made a pillow for her head; her soft dark hair, unfastened, half hid her, like a veil; the other arm lay loose by her side; her lips were white, her face was bloodless; but there was blood on the deep blue folds about the bosom, and on the floor. At the further side of this girl,—who was dead, or seemingly dead,—sat, on a low stool, a woman, in a crouching cat-like attitude, quite silent and still. The knife with which she had done the deed was dripping in her hand; the noise of the broken door and of the entering throng had not disturbed her.

For a moment even Barton's rapidity of action and resolution was paralysed by the terrible and strange vision that he beheld. He stared with all his eyes, in a mist of doubt and amazement, at a vision, dreadful even to one who saw death every day. Then the modern spirit awoke in him.

"Fetch a policeman," he whispered to one of the crowding, frightened troop of girls.

"There is a copper at the door, sir; here he

comes," said Susan, the young woman who had called Barton from the *Hit or Miss*.

The helmet of the guardian of the peace appeared welcome above the throng.

And still the pale woman in white sat as motionless as the stricken girl at her feet—as if she had not been an actor, but a figure in a *tableau*.

"Policeman," said Barton, "I give that woman in charge for an attempt at murder. Take her to the station."

"I don't like the looks of her," whispered the policeman. "I'd better get her knife from her first, sir."

"Be quick, whatever you do, and have the house cleared. I can't look after the wounded girl in this crowd."

Thus addressed, the policeman stole round towards the seated woman, whose eyes had never deigned, all this time, to stray from the body of her victim. Barton stealthily drew near, outflanking her on the other side.

They were just within arm's reach of the murderess when she leaped with incredible suddenness to her feet, and stood for one moment erect and lovely as a statue, her fair locks lying about her shoulders. Then she raised her right hand; the knife flashed and dropped like lightning into her breast, and she, too, fell beside the body of the girl whom she had stricken.

"By George, she 's gone!" cried the policeman. Barton pushed past him, and laid his hand on the woman's heart. She stirred once, was violently shaken with the agony of death, and so passed away, carrying into silence her secret and her story.

Mr. Cranley's hopes had been, at least partially, fulfilled.

"Drink, I suppose, as usual. A rummy start!"

remarked the policeman, sententiously; and then, while Barton was sounding and stanching the wound of the housekeeper's victim, and applying such styptics as he had within reach, the guardian of social order succeeded in clearing *The Bunhouse* of its patrons, in closing the door, and in sending a message (by the direction of the girl who had summoned Barton, and who seemed not devoid of sense) to Mrs. St. John Deloraine. While that lady was being expected, the girl, who now took a kind of subordinate lead, was employed by Barton in helping to carry Margaret to her own room, and in generally restoring order.

When the messenger arrived at Mrs. St. John Deloraine's house with Barton's brief note, and with his own curt statement that "murder was being done at *The Bunhouse*," he found the Lady Superior rehearsing for a play. Mrs. St. John Deloraine was going to give a drawing-room representation of *Nitouche*, and the terrible news found her in one of the costumes of the heroine. With a very brief explanation (variously misunderstood by her guests and fellow-amateurs) Mrs. St. John Deloraine hurried off, "just as she was," and astonished Barton (who had never seen her before) by arriving at *The Bunhouse* as a rather conventional shepherdess, in pink and grey, rouged, and with a fluffy flaxen wig. The versatility with which Mrs. St. John Deloraine made the best of all worlds occasionally led her into *inconséquences* of this description.

But, if she was on pleasure bent, Mrs. St. John Deloraine had also, not only a kind heart, but a practical mind. In five minutes she had heard the tragic history, had dried her eyes, torn off her wig, and settled herself as nurse by the bedside of Margaret. The girl's wound, as Barton was happily able to assure her, was by no means

really dangerous; for the point of the weapon had been turned, and had touched no vital part. But the prodigious force with which the blow had followed on a scene of violent reproaches and insane threats (described by one of the young women) had affected most perilously a constitution already weakened by sickness and trouble. Mrs. St. John Deloraine, assisted by the most responsible of *The Bunhouse* girls, announced her intention to sit up all night with the patient. Barton—who was moved, perhaps, as much by the beauty of the girl, and by the excitement of the events, as by professional duty—remained in attendance till nearly dawn, when the Lady Superior insisted that he should go home and take some rest. As the danger for the patient was not immediate, but lay in the chances of fever, Barton allowed himself to be persuaded, and, at about five in the morning, he let himself out of *The Bunhouse*, and made sleepily for his lodgings. But sleep that night was to be a stranger to him, and his share of adventures—which, like sorrows, never "come as single spies, but in battalions"—was by no means exhausted.

The night, through which the first glimpse of dawn just peered, was extremely cold; and Barton, who had left his great-coat in the *Hit or Miss*, stamped his way homeward, his hands deep in his pockets, his hat tight on his head, and with his pipe for company.

"There 's the grey beginning, Zooks," he muttered to himself, in half-conscious quotation. He was as drowsy as a man can be who still steps along and keeps an open eye. The streets were empty, a sandy wind was walking them alone, and hard by the sullen river flowed on, the lamplights dimly reflected in the growing blue of morning. Barton was just passing the locked

doors of the *Hit or Miss*,—for he preferred to go homeward by the riverside,—when a singular sound, or mixture of sounds, from behind the battered old hoarding close by, attracted his attention. In a moment he was as alert as if he had not passed a *nuit blanche*. The sound at first seemed not very unlike that which a traction engine, or any other monster that murders sleep, may make before quite getting up steam. Then there was plainly discernible a great whirring and flapping, as if a windmill had become deranged in its economy, and was labouring "without a conscience or an aim." Whirr, whirr, flap, thump, came the sounds, and then, mixed with and dominating them, the choking scream of a human being in agony. But, strangely enough, the scream appeared to be half-checked and suppressed, as if the sufferer, whoever he might be, and whatever his torment, were striving with all his might to endure in silence. Barton had heard such cries in the rooms of the hospital. To such sounds the Question Chambers of old prisons and palaces must often have echoed. Barton stopped, thrilling with a half-superstitious dread; so moving, in that urban waste, were the accents of pain.

Then whirr, flap, came the noise again, and again the human note was heard, and was followed by a groan. The time seemed infinite, though it was only to be reckoned by moments, or pulse-beats,—the time during which the torturing crank revolved, and was answered by the hard-wrung exclamation of agony. Barton looked at the palings of the hoarding: they were a couple of feet higher than his head. Then he sprang up, caught the top at a place where the rusty-pointed nails were few and broken, and next moment, with torn coat and a scratch on his arm, he was within the palisade.

Through the crepuscular light, bulks of things—big, black, formless—were dimly seen; but nearer the hoarding than the middle of the waste open ground was a spectacle that puzzled the looker-on. Great fans were winnowing the air, a wheel was running at prodigious speed, flaming vapours fled hissing forth, and the figure of a man, attached in some way to the revolving fans, was now lifted several feet from the ground, now dashed to earth again, now caught in and now torn from the teeth of the flying wheel.

Barton did not pause long in empty speculation; he shouted, "Hold on!" or some other such encouragement, and ran in the direction of the sufferer. But, as he stumbled over dust-heaps, piles of wood, old baskets, outworn hats, forsaken boots, and all the rubbish of the waste land, the movement of the flying fans began to slacken, the wheels ran slowly down, and, with a great throb and creak, the whole engine ceased moving, as a heart stops beating. Then, just when all was over, a voice came from the crumpled mass of humanity in the centre of the hideous mechanism:

"Don't come here; stop, on your peril! I am armed, and I will shoot!"

The last words were feeble, and scarcely audible.

Barton stood still. Even a brave man likes (the old Irish duelling days being over) at least to know *why* he is to be shot at.

"What's the matter with you?" he said. "What on earth are you doing? How can *you* talk about shooting? Have you a whole bone in your body?"

To this the only reply was another groan; then silence.

By this time there was a full measure of the light "which London takes the day to be," and

Barton had a fair view of his partner in this dialogue.

He could see the crumpled form of a man, weak and distorted like a victim of the rack,—scattered, so to speak,—in a posture inconceivably out of drawing, among the fragments of the engine. The man's head was lowest, and rested on an old battered box; his middle was supported by a beam of the engine; one of his legs was elevated on one of the fans, the other hung disjointedly in the air. The man was strangely dressed in a close-fitting suit of cloth,—something between the uniform of bicycle clubs and the tights affected by acrobats. Long, thin, grey locks fell back from a high yellow forehead: there was blood on his mouth and about his beard.

Barton drew near and touched him: the man only groaned.

"How am I to help you out of this?" said the surgeon, carefully examining his patient, as he might now be called. A little close observation showed that the man's arms were strapped by buckles into the fans, while one of his legs was caught up in some elastic coils of the mechanism.

With infinite tenderness, Barton disengaged the victim, whose stifled groans proved at once the extent of his sufferings and of his courage.

Finally, the man was free from the machine, and Barton discovered that, as far as a rapid investigation could show, there were no fatal injuries done, though a leg, an arm, and several ribs were fractured, and there were many contusions.

"Now I must leave you here for a few minutes, while I go round to the police-office and get men and a stretcher," said Barton.

The man held up one appealing hand; the other was paralysed.

"First hide all *this*," he murmured, moving his head so as to indicate the fragments of his engine. They lay all confused, a heap of spars, cogs, wheels, fans, and what not, a puzzle to the science of mechanics. "Don't let them know a word about it," he said. "Say I had an accident—that I was sleep-walking, and fell from a window,—say anything you like, but promise to keep my secret. In a week," he murmured dreamily, "it would have been complete. It is the second time I have just missed success and fame."

"I have not an idea what your secret may be," said Barton; "but here goes for the machine."

And, while the wounded man watched him with piteous and wistful eyes, he rapidly hid different fragments of the mechanism beneath and among the heaps of rubbish, which were many, and, for purposes of concealment, meritorious.

"Are you sure you can find them all again?" asked the victim of misplaced ingenuity.

"Oh yes, all right," said Barton.

"Then you must get me to the street before you bring any help. If they find me here they will ask questions, and my secret will come out."

"But how on earth am I to get you to the street?" Barton enquired, very naturally. "Even if you could bear being carried, I could not lift you over the hoarding."

"I can bear anything,—I will bear anything," said the man. "Look in my breast, and you will find a key of a door in the palings."

Barton looked as directed, and, fastened round the neck of the sufferer by a leather shoe-tie, he discovered, sure enough, a kind of skeleton-key in strong wire.

"With that you can open the gate, and get me into the street," said the crushed man; "but be

very careful not to open the door while anyone is passing."

He only got out these messages very slowly, and after intervals of silence broken by groans.

"Wait! one thing more," he said, as Barton stooped to take him in his arms. "I may faint from pain. My address is, Paterson's Rents, hard by; my name is Winter." Then, after a pause, "I can pay for a private room at the infirmary, and I must have one. Lift the third plank from the end in the left-hand corner by the window, and you will find enough. Now!"

Then Barton very carefully picked up the poor man, mere bag of bones (and broken bones) as he was.

The horrible pain that the man endured Barton could imagine, yet he dared not hurry, for the ground was strewn with every sort of pit-fall. At last—it seemed hours to Barton, it must have been an eternity to the sufferer—the hoarding was reached, and, after listening earnestly, Barton opened the door, peered out, saw that the coast was clear, deposited his burden on the pavement, and flew to the not distant police-station.

He was not absent long, and returning with four men and a stretcher, he found, of course, quite a large crowd grouped round the place where he had left his charge. The milkman was there, several shabby women, one or two puzzled policemen, three cabmen (though no wizard could have called up a cab at that hour and place had he wanted to catch a train); there were riverside loafers, workmen going to their labour, and a lucky penny-a-liner with his "tissue" and pencil.

Pushing his way through those gapers, Barton found, as he expected, that his patient had fainted. He aided the policemen to place him on the stretcher, accompanied him to the infirmary

(how common a sight is that motionless body on a stretcher in the streets!), explained as much of the case as was fitting to the surgeon in attendance, and then, at last, returned to his rooms and a bath, puzzling over the mystery.

"By Jove!" he said, as he helped himself to a devilled wing of chicken at breakfast, "I believe the poor beggar had been experimenting with a Flying Machine!"

CHAPTER XII.

A Patient.

A DOCTOR, especially a doctor actively practising among the poor and laborious, soon learns to take the incidents of his profession rather calmly. Barton had often been called in when a revel had ended in suicide or death; and if he had never before seen a man caught in a flying machine, he had been used to heal wounds quite as dreadful caused by engines of a more familiar nature.

Though Barton, therefore, could go out to his round of visits on the day after his adventurous vigil without unusual emotion, it may be conceived that the distress and confusion at *The Bunhouse* were very great. The police and the gloomy attendants on Death were in the place; Mrs. St. John Deloraine had to see many official people, to answer many disagreeable questions, and suffered in every way extremely from the consequences of her beneficent enterprise. But she displayed a coolness and business-like common sense worthy of a less ver-

satile philanthropist, and found time, amid the temporary ruin of her work, to pay due attention to Margaret. She had scarcely noticed the girl before, taking her very much on trust, and being preoccupied with various schemes of social enjoyment. But now she was struck by her beauty and her educated manner, though that, to be sure, was amply accounted for by the explanations offered by Cranley before her engagement. Already Mrs. St. John Deloraine was conceiving a project of perpetual friendship, and had made up her mind to adopt Margaret as a daughter, or, let us say, niece and companion. The girl was too refined to cope with the rough-and-ready young patronesses of *The Bunhouse*.

If the lady's mind was even more preoccupied by the survivor in the hideous events of the evening than by the tragedy itself and the dead woman, Barton, too, found his thoughts straying to his new patient—not that he was a flirt or a sentimentalist. Even in the spring Barton's fancy did not lightly turn to thoughts of love. He was not one of those "amatorious" young men (as Milton says, perhaps at too great length) who cannot see a pretty girl without losing their hearts to her. Barton was not so prodigal of his affections; yet it were vain to deny that, as he went his rather drowsy round of professional visits, his ideas were more apt to stray to the girl who had been stabbed, than to the man who had been rescued from the machinery. The man was old, yellow, withered, and, in Barton's private opinion, more of a lunatic charlatan than a successful inventor. The girl was young, beautiful, and interesting enough, apart from her wound, to demand and secure a place in any fancy absolutely free.

It was no more than Barton's actual duty to call at *The Old English Bunhouse* in the afternoon.

Here he was welcomed by Mrs. St. John Deloraine, who was somewhat pale and shaken by the horrors of the night. She had turned all her young customers out, and had stuck up a paper bearing a legend to the effect that *The Old English Bunhouse* was closed for the present and till further notice. A wistful crowd was drawn up on the opposite side of the street, and was staring at *The Bunhouse.*

Mrs. St. John Deloraine welcomed Barton, it might almost be said, with open arms. She had by this time, of course, laid aside the outward guise of Nitouche, and was dressed like other ladies, but better.

"My dear Mr. Barton," she exclaimed, "your patient is doing very well indeed. She will be crazy with delight when she hears that you have called."

Barton could not help being pleased at this intelligence, even when he had discounted it as freely as even a very brief acquaintance with Mrs. St. John Deloraine taught her friends to do.

"Do you think she is able to see me?" he asked.

"I 'll run to her room and inquire," said Mrs. St. John Deloraine, fleeting nimbly up the steep stairs, and leaving, like Astræa, as described by Charles Lamb's friend, a kind of rosy track or glow behind her from the chastened splendour of her very becoming hose.

Barton waited rather impatiently till the lady of *The Bunhouse* returned with the message that he might accompany her into the presence of the invalid.

A very brief interview satisfied him that his patient was going on even better than he had hoped; also that she possessed very beautiful and melancholy eyes. She said little, but that little kindly, and asked whether Mr. Cranley had sent to inquire for her. Mrs. St. John Deloraine an-

swered the question, which puzzled Barton, in the negative; and when they had left Margaret (Miss Burnside, as Mrs. St. John Deloraine called her), he ventured to ask who the Mr. Cranley might be about whom the girl had spoken.

"Well," replied Mrs. St. John Deloraine, "it was through Mr. Cranley that I engaged both Miss Burnside and that unhappy woman whom I can't think of without shuddering. The inquest is to be held to-morrow. It is too dreadful when these things, that have been only names, come home to one. Now I really do not like to think hardly of anybody, but I must admit that Mr. Cranley has quite misled me about the housekeeper. He gave her an excellent character, *especially* for sobriety, and till yesterday I had no fault to find with her. Then, the girls say, she became quite wild and intoxicated, and it is hard to believe that this is the first time she yielded to that horrid temptation. Don't you think it was odd of Mr. Cranley? And I sent round a messenger with a note to his rooms, but it was returned, marked, 'Has left; address not known.' I don't know what has become of him. Perhaps the housekeeper could have told us, but the unfortunate woman is beyond reach of questions."

"Do you mean the Mr. Cranley who is Rector of St. Medard's in Chelsea?" asked Barton.

"No; I mean Mr. Thomas Cranley, the son of the Earl of Birkenhead. He was a great friend of mine."

"Mr. Thomas Cranley!" exclaimed Barton, with an expression of face which probably spoke at least three volumes, and these of a highly sensational character.

"Now, please," cried Mrs. St. John Deloraine, clasping her hands in a pretty attitude of entreaty, like a recording angel hesitating to enter the pec-

cadillo of a favourite saint, "please don't say you know anything against Mr. Cranley. I am aware that he has many enemies."

Barton was silent for a minute. He had that good old schoolboy feeling about not telling tales out of school, which is so English and so unknown in France; but, on the other side, he could scarcely think it right to leave a lady of invincible innocence at the mercy of a confirmed scoundrel.

"Upon my word, it is a very unpleasant thing to have to say; but really, if you ask me, I should remark that Mr. Cranley's enemies are of his own making. *I* would not go to him for a girl's character, I 'm sure. But I thought he had disappeared from Society."

"So he had. He told me that there was a conspiracy against him, and that I was one of the few people who, he felt sure, would never desert him. And I never would. I never turn my back on my friends."

"If there was a conspiracy," said Barton, "I am the ringleader in it; for, as you ask me, I must assure you, on my honour, that I detected Mr. Cranley in the act of trying to cheat some very young men at cards. I would not have mentioned it for the world," he added, almost alarmed at the expression of pain and terror in Mrs. St. John Deloraine's face; "but you wished to be told. And I could not honestly leave you in the belief that he is a man to be trusted. What he did when I saw him was only what all who knew him well would have expected. And his treatment of you, in the matter of that woman's character, was," cried Barton, growing indignant as he thought of it, "one of the very basest things I ever heard of. I had seen that woman before: she was not fit to be entrusted with the care of girls. She was at one time very well known."

Mrs. St. John Deloraine's face had passed through every shade of expression—doubt, shame, and indignation; but now it assumed an air of hope.

"Margaret has always spoken so well of him," she said half to herself. "He was always very kind to her, and yet she was only the poor daughter of a humble acquaintance."

"Perhaps he deviated into kindness for once," said Barton; "but as to his general character, it is certain that it was on a par with the trap he laid for you. I wish I knew where to find him. You must never let him get the poor girl back into his hands."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. St. John Deloraine, with conviction in her voice; "and now I must go back to her, and see whether she wants anything. Do you think I may soon move her to my own house, in Cheyne Walk? It is not far, and she will be so much more comfortable there."

"The best thing you can do," said Barton; "and be sure you send for me if you want me, or if you ever hear anything more of Mr. Cranley. I am quite ready to meet him anywhere."

"You will call to-morrow?"

"Certainly, about this time," said Barton; and he kept his promise assiduously, calling often.

A fortnight went by, and Margaret, almost restored to health, and in a black tea-gown, the property of Mrs. St. John Deloraine, was lying indolently on a sofa in the house in Cheyne Walk. She was watching the struggle between the waning daylight and the fire, when the door opened, and the servant announced "Dr. Barton."

Margaret held forth a rather languid hand.

"I'm so sorry Mrs. St. John Deloraine is out," she said. "She is at a soap-bubble party. I wish *I* could go. It is so long since I saw any children, or had any fun."

So Margaret spoke, and then she sighed, remembering the reason why she should not attend soap-bubble parties.

"I 'm selfish enough to be glad you could not go," said Barton; "for then I should have missed you. But why do you sigh?"

"I have had a good many things to make me unhappy," said Margaret, "in addition to my—to my accident. You must not think I am always bewailing myself. But perhaps you know that I lost my father, just before I entered Mrs. St. John Deloraine's service, and then my whole course of life was altered."

"I am very sorry for you," said Barton simply. He did not know what else to say; but he felt more than his conventional words indicated, and perhaps he looked as if he felt it, and more.

Margaret was still too weak to bear an expression of sympathy, and tears came into her eyes, followed by a blush on her pale thin cheeks. She was on the point of breaking down.

There is nothing in the world so trying to a young man as to see a girl crying. A wild impulse to kiss and comfort her passed through Barton's mind, before he said awkwardly again—

"I can't tell you how sorry I am; I wish I could do anything for you. Can't I help you in any way? You must not give up so early in the troubles of life; and then, who knows but yours, having begun soon, are nearly over?"

Barton would perhaps have liked to ask her to let him see that they *were* over, as far as one mortal can do as much for another.

"They have been going on so long," said Margaret. "I have had such a wandering life, and such changes."

Barton would have given much to be able to ask for more information; but more was not offered.

"Let us think of the future," he said. "Have you any idea about what you mean to do?"

"Mrs. St. John Deloraine is very kind. She wishes me to stay with her always. But I am puzzled about Mr. Cranley. I don't know what he would like me to do. He seems to have gone abroad."

Barton hated to hear her mention Cranley's name.

"Had you known him long?" he asked.

"No; for a very short time only. But he was an old friend of my father's, and had promised him to take care of me. He took me away from school, and he gave me a start in life."

"But surely he might have found something more worthy of you, of your education," said Barton.

"What can a girl do?" answered Margaret. "We know so little. I could hardly even have taught very little children. They thought me dreadfully backward at school,—at least, Miss—— I mean, the teachers thought me backward."

"I'm sure you know as much as anyone should," said Barton, indignantly. "Were you at a nice school?" he added.

He had been puzzling himself for many days over Margaret's history. She seemed to have had at least the ordinary share of education, and knowledge of the world; and yet he had found her occupying a menial position at a philanthropic bunhouse. Even now she was a mere dependant of Mrs. St. John Deloraine's, though there was a staunchness in that lady's character which made her patronage not precarious.

"There were some nice girls at it," answered Margaret, without committing herself.

Rochefoucauld declares that there are excellent marriages, but no such thing as a delightful mar-

riage. Perhaps school-girls may admit, as an abstract truth, that good schools exist; but few would allow that any place of education is "nice."

"It is really getting quite late," Barton observed reluctantly. He liked to watch the girl, whose beauty, made wan by illness, received just a touch of becoming red from the glow of the fire. He liked to talk to her; in fact, this was his most interesting patient by far. It would be miserably black and dark in his lodgings, he was aware; and non-paying patients would be importunate in proportion to their poverty. The poor are often the most exacting of hypochondriacs.

Margaret noticed his reluctance to go contending with a sense of what he owed to propriety.

"I am sure you must want tea; but I don't like to ring. It is so short a time since I wore an apron and a cap and the rest of it myself at *The Bunhouse*, that I am afraid to ask the servants to do anything for me. They must dislike me: it is very natural."

"It is not natural at all," said Barton with conviction; "perfectly monstrous, on the other hand." This little compliment eclipsed the effect of firelight on the girl's face. "Suppose *I* ring," he added, "and then you can say, when Mary says 'Did you ring, miss?' 'No, I didn't ring; but as you *are* here, Mary, would you mind bringing tea?'"

"I don't know if that would be quite honest," said Margaret, doubtfully.

"A pious fraud—a drawing-room comedy," said Barton: "have we rehearsed it enough?"

Then he touched the bell, and the little piece of private theatricals was played out, though one of the artists had some difficulty (as amateurs often have) in subduing an inclination to giggle.

"Now this is quite perfect," said Barton, when

he had been accommodated with a large piece of plum-cake. "This is the very kind of cake which we specially prohibit our patients to touch; and so near dinner-time, too! There should be a new proverb, 'Physician, diet thyself.' You see, we don't all live on a very thin slice of cold bacon and a piece of dry toast."

"Mrs. St. John Deloraine has never taken up that kind of life," said Margaret.

"She tries a good many new things," Barton remarked.

"Yes; but she is the best woman in the world!" answered the girl. "Oh, if you knew what a comfort it is to be with a lady again!" And she shuddered as she remembered her late chaperon.

"I wonder if some day,—you won't think me very rude?" asked Barton,—"you would mind telling me a little of your history?"

"Mr. Cranley ordered me to say nothing about it," answered Margaret; "and a great deal is very sad and hard to tell. You are all so kind, and everything is so quiet here, and safe and peaceful, that it frightens me to think of things that have happened, or may happen."

"They shall never happen, if you will trust me," cried Barton, when a carriage was heard to stop at the gateway of the garden outside.

"Here is Mrs. St. John Deloraine at last," cried Margaret, starting to run to the window; but she was so weak that she tripped, and would have fallen had Barton not caught her lightly.

"Oh, how stupid you must think me!" she said, blushing. And Barton thought he had never seen anything so pretty.

"Once for all, I don't think you stupid, or backward, or anything else that you call yourself."

But at that very moment the door opened, and Mrs. St. John Deloraine entered, magnificently

comfortable in furs, and bringing a fresh air of hospitality and content with existence into the room.

"Oh, *you* are here!" she cried, "and I have almost missed you. Now you *must* stay to dinner. You need not dress; we are all alone, Margaret and I."

So he did stop to dine, and pauper hypochondriacs, eager for his society (which was always cheering), knocked, and rang also, at his door in vain. It was an excellent dinner; and, on the wings of the music Mrs. St. John Deloraine was playing in the front drawing-room, two happy hours passed lightly over Barton and Margaret, into the backward, where all hours—good and evil—abide, remembered or forgotten.

CHAPTER XIII.

Another Patient.

"Des ailes! des ailes! des ailes!
Comme dans le chant de Ruckert."
THEOPHILE GAUTIER.

"SO you think a flying machine impossible, sir, and me, I presume, a fanatic? Well, well, you have Eusebius with you. 'Such an one,' he says,—meaning me, and inventors like me,—'is a little crazed with the humours of melancholy.'"

The speaker was the man whom Barton had rescued from the cogs and wheels and springs of an infuriated engine. Barton could not but be interested in the courage and perseverance of this

sufferer, whom he was visiting in hospital. The young surgeon had gone to inspect the room in Paterson's Rents, and had found it, as he more or less expected, the conventional den of the needy inventor. Our large towns are full of such persons. They are the Treasure Hunters of cities and of civilisation—the modern seekers for the Philosopher's Stone. At the end of a vista of dreams they behold the great Discovery made perfect, and themselves the winners of fame and of wealth incalculable.

For the present, most of these visionaries are occupied with electricity. They intend to make the lightning a domestic slave in every house, and to turn Ariel into a common carrier. But, from the aspect of Winter's den in Paterson's Rents, it was easy to read that his heart was set on a more ancient foible. The white deal book-shelves, home-made, which lined every wall, were packed with tattered books on mechanics, and especially on the art of flying. Here you saw the spoils of the fourpenny box of cheap bookvendors mixed with volumes in better condition, purchased at a larger cost. Here—among the litter of tattered pamphlets and well-thumbed *Proceedings* of the Linnean and the Aeronautic Society of Great Britain—here were Fredericus Hermannus' *De Arte Volandi*, and Cayley's works, and Hatton Turner's *Astra Castra*, and the *Voyage to the Moon* of Cyrano de Bergerac, and Bishop Wilkins's *Dædalus*, and the same sanguine prelate's *Mercury*, *The Secret Messenger*. Here were Cardan and Raymond Lully, and a shabby set of the classics, mostly in French translations, and a score of lucubrations by French and other inventors,—Ponton d'Amécourt, Borelli, Chabrier, Girard, and Marey.

Even if his books had not shown the direction of the new patient's mind—(a man is known by

his books at least as much as by his companions, and companions Winter had none)—even if the shelves had not spoken clearly, the models and odds-and-ends in the room would have proclaimed him an inventor. As the walls were hidden by his library, and as the floor, also, was littered with tomes and pamphlets and periodicals, a quantity of miscellaneous gear was hung by hooks from the ceiling.

Barton, who was more than commonly tall, found his head being buffeted by big preserved wings of birds and other flying things—from the sweeping pinions of the albatross to the leathery covering of the bat. From the ceiling, too, hung models, cleverly constructed in various materials; and here—a cork with quills stuck into it, and with a kind of drill-bow—was the little flying model of Sir George Cayley. The whole place, dusty and musty, with a faded smell of the oil in birds' feathers, was almost more noisome than curious. When Barton left it, his mind was made up as to the nature of Winter's secret, or delusion; and when he visited that queer patient in hospital, he was not surprised either by his smattered learning or by his golden dreams.

"Yes, sir; Eusebius is against me, no doubt," Winter went on with his eager talk. "An acute man,—rather *too* acute, don't you think, for a Father of the Church? That habit he got into of smashing the arguments of the heathen, gave him a kind of flippancy in talking of high matters."

"Such as flying?" put in Barton.

"Yes; such as our great aim,—the aim of all the ages, I may call it. What does Bishop Wilkins say, sir? Why, he says, 'I doubt not but that flying in the air may be easily effected by a diligent and ingenious artificer.' 'Diligent,' I may say, I have been; as to 'ingenious,' I leave the verdict to others."

"Was that Peter Wilkins you were quoting?" asked Barton, to humour his man.

"Why, no sir; the Bishop was not Peter. Peter Wilkins is the hero of a mere romance, in which, it is true, we meet with women—*Goories* he calls them—endowed with the power of flight. But *they* were born so. We get no help from Peter Wilkins: a mere dreamer."

"It doesn't seem to be so easy as the Bishop fancies?" remarked Barton, leading him on.

"No, sir," cried Winter, all his aches and pain forgotten, and his pale face flushed with the delight of finding a listener who did not laugh at him. "No, sir; the Bishop, though ingenious, was not a practical man. But look at what he says about the *weight* of your flying machine! Can anything be more sensible? Borne out, too, by the most recent researches, and the authority of Professor Pettigrew Bell himself. You remember the iron fly made by Regimontanus of Nuremberg?"

"The iron fly!" murmured Barton. "I can't say I do."

"You will find a history of it in Ramus. This fly would leap from the hands of the great Regimontanus, flutter and buzz round the heads of his guests assembled at supper, and then, as if wearied, return and repose on the finger of its maker."

"You don't mean to say you believe *that?*" asked Barton.

"Why not, sir; why not? Did not Archytas of Tarentum, one of Plato's acquaintances, construct a wooden dove, in no way less miraculous? And the same Regimontanus, at Nuremberg, fashioned an eagle, which, by way of triumph, did fly out of the city to meet Charles V. But where was I? Oh, at Bishop Wilkins. Cardan doubted of the iron fly of Regimontanus, because the material was so heavy. But Bishop Wilkins argues, in

accordance with the best modern authorities, that the weight is no hindrance whatever, if proportional to the motive power. A flying machine, says Professor Bell, in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* —(you will not question the authority of the *Encyclopædia Britannica?*)—a flying machine should be 'a compact, moderately heavy, and powerful structure.' There, you see, the Bishop was right."

"Yours was deuced powerful," remarked Barton. "I did not expect to see two limbs of you left together."

"It *is* powerful, or rather it *was*," answered Winter, with a heavy sigh; "but it 's all to do over again—all to do over again! Yet it was a noble specimen. 'The passive surface was reduced to a minimum,' as the learned author in the *Encyclopædia* recommends."

"By Jove! the passive surface was jolly near reduced to a mummy. *You* were the passive surface, as far as I could see."

"Don't laugh at me, please sir, after you 've been so kind. All the rest laugh at me. You can't think what a pleasure it has been to talk to a scholar," and there was a new flush on the poor fellow's cheek, and something watery in his eyes.

"I beg your pardon, my dear sir," cried Barton, greatly ashamed of himself. "Pray go on. The subject is entirely new to me. I had not been aware that there were any serious modern authorities in favour of the success of this kind of experiment."

"Thank you, sir," said Winter, much encouraged, and taking Barton's hand in his own battered claw; "thank you. But why should we run only to modern authorities? All great inventions, all great ideas, have been present to men's minds and hopes from the beginning of civilisation. Did not Empedocles forestall Mr. Darwin,

and hit out, at a stroke, the hypothesis of natural selection?"

"Well, he *did* make a shot at it," admitted Barton, who remembered as much as that from "the old coaching days," and college lectures at St. Gatien's.

"Well, what do we find? As soon as we get a whisper of civilisation in Greece, we find Dædalus successful in flying. The pragmatic interpreters pretend that the fable does but point to the discovery of sails for ships; but, I put it to you, is that probable?"

"Obvious bosh," said Barton.

"And the meteorological mythologists, sir, *they* maintain that Dædalus is only the lightning flying in the breast of the storm!"

"There's nothing those fellows won't say," replied Barton.

"I'm glad you are with me, sir. In Dædalus *I* see either a record of a successful attempt at artificial flight, or, at the very least, the expression of an aspiration as old as culture. *You* wouldn't make Dædalus the evening clouds accompanying Minos, the sun, to his setting in Sicily, in the West?" added Winter anxiously.

"I never heard of such nonsense," said Barton.

"Sir Frederick Leighton, the President of the Royal Academy, is with me, sir, if I may judge by his picture of Dædalus."

"Every sensible man must be with you," answered Barton.

"Well, sir, I won't detain you with other famous fliers of antiquity, such as Abaris, mounted on an arrow, as described by Herodotus. Doubtless, the arrow was a flying machine, a novelty to the ignorant Scythians."

"It *must* have been, indeed."

"Then there was the Greek who flew before

Nero in the circus; but he, I admit, had a bad fall, as Suetonius recounts. That character of Lucian's, who employed an eagle's wing and a vulture's in his flight, I take to be a mere figment of the satirist's imagination. But what do you make of Simon Magus? He, I cannot doubt, had invented a machine in which, like myself, he made use of steam or naphtha. This may be gathered from Arnobius, our earliest authority. He mentions expressly *currum Simonis Magi et quadrigas igneas*, the chariot of Simon Magus and his *vehicles of flame*,—clearly the naphtha is alluded to,—which vanished into air at the word of the Apostle Peter. The latter circumstance, as being miraculous, I take leave to doubt; but certainly Simon Magus had overcome the difficulties of aërial navigation. But, though Petrus Crinitus rejects the tradition as fabulous, I am prepared to believe that Simon Magus actually flew from the Capitol to the Aventine!"

"'The world knows nothing of its greatest men,'" quoted Barton.

"Simon Magus has been the victim, sir, of theological acrimony, his character blackened, his flying machine impugned, or ascribed, as by the credulous Arnobius, to diabolical arts. In the dark ages, naturally, the science of Artificial Flight was either neglected or practised in secret, through fear of persecution. Busbequius speaks of a Turk at Constantinople who attempted something in this way; but he (the Turk, I mean) was untrammelled by ecclesiastical prejudice. But why should we tarry in the past? Have we not Mr. Proctor with us, both in *Knowledge* and the *Cornhill*? Does not that preëminent authority, Professor Pettigrew Bell, himself declare, with the weight, too, of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, that 'the number of successful flying

models is considerable. It is not too much to expect,' he goes on, 'that the problem of artificial flight will be actually solved, or at least much simplified.' What less can we expect, as he observes, in the land of Watts and Stephenson, when the construction of flying machines has been 'taken up in earnest by practical men?'"

"We may indeed," said Barton, "hope for the best when persons of your learning and ingenuity devote their efforts to the cause."

"As to my learning, you flatter me," said Winter. "I am no scholar; but an enthusiast will study the history of his subject. Did I remark that the great Dr. Johnson, in these matters so sceptical, admits (in a romance, it is true) the possibility of artificial flight? The artisan of the Happy Valley expected to solve the problem in one year's time. 'If all men were equally virtuous,' said this artist, 'I should with equal alacrity teach them all to fly.'"

"And you will keep your secret, like Dr. Johnson's artist?"

"To *you* I do not mind revealing this much. The vans or wings of my machine describe elliptic figures of eight——"

"I've seen them do *that*," said Barton.

"Like the wings of birds; and have the same forward and downward stroke, by a direct piston action. The impetus is given, after a descent in air,—which I effected by starting from a height of six feet only,—by a combination of heated naphtha and of india rubber under torsion. By steam alone, in 1842, Philips made a model of a flying machine soar across two fields. Penaud's machine, relying only on india rubber under torsion, flies for some fifty yards. What a model can do, as Bishop Wilkins well observes, a properly weighted and proportioned flying machine, capable of carrying a man, can do also."

"But yours, when I first had the pleasure of meeting you, was not carrying you at all."

"Something had gone wrong with the mechanism," answered Winter, sighing. "It is always so. An inventor has many things to contend against. Remember Arkwright, and how he was puzzled hopelessly by that trifling error in the thickness of the valves in his spinning machine. He had to give half his profits to Strutt, the local blacksmith, before Strutt would tell him that he had only to chalk his valves! The thickness of a coating of chalk made all the difference. Some trifle like that, depend on it, interfered with my machine. You see, I am obliged to make my experiments at night, and in the dark, for fear of being discovered and anticipated. I have been on the verge—nay, *over* the verge—of success. 'No imaginable invention,' Bishop Wilkins says, 'could prove of greater benefit to the world, or greater glory to the author.' A few weeks ago that glory was mine!"

"Why a few weeks ago?" asked Barton. "Was your machine more advanced then than when I met you?"

"I cannot explain what had happened to check its motion," said Winter, wearily; "but a few weeks ago my *machine acted*, and I may say that I knew the sensations of a bird on the wing."

"Do you mean that you actually *flew?*"

"For a very short distance, I did indeed, sir!"

Barton looked at him curiously: two currents of thought—one wild and credulous, the other practical and professional—surged and met in his brain. The professional current proved the stronger for the moment.

"Good-night," he said. "You are tiring and over-exciting yourself. I will call again soon."

He *did* call again, and Winter told him a tale which will be repeated in its proper place.

CHAPTER XIV.

Found.

"All precious things, discovered late,
To those that seek them issue forth;
For Love, in sequel, works with Fate,
And draws the veil from hidden worth."
The Sleeping Beauty.

THAT Margaret and Barton were losing their hearts to each other could not, of course, escape the keen eye of Mrs. St. John Deloraine. She noticed that Margaret, though perfectly restored to health, and lacking only the clear brown over the rose of her cheeks, was by no means so light of heart as in the very earliest days of her recovery. Love makes men and women poor company, and, to speak plainly, takes the fun out of them. Margaret was absent-minded, given to long intervals of silence, a bad listener,—all of them things hateful to Mrs. St. John Deloraine, but pardoned, in this instance, by the benevolent lady. Margaret was apt to blush without apparent cause, to start when a knock came to the door, to leave the room hurriedly, and need to be sought and brought back, when Barton called. Nor was Barton himself such good company as he had been. His manner was uncertain and constrained; his visits began to be paid at longer intervals; he seemed to have little to say, or talked in fits and starts; and yet he did not know how to go away.

Persons much less clear-sighted than Mrs. St. John Deloraine could have interpreted, without difficulty, this awkward position of affairs.

Now, like most women of her kindly and impulsive character (when it has not been refined

away into nothing by social hypocrisies), Mrs. St. John Deloraine was a perfectly reckless match-maker. She believed in love with her whole heart; it was a joy to her to mark the beginnings of inclination in two young souls, and she simply revelled in an "engagement." All considerations of economy, prudence, and foresight melted away before the ardour of her enthusiasm: to fall in love first, to get engaged next, and to be married as soon as possible afterwards, without regard to consequences of any kind, were, in this lady's mind, heroic actions, and almost the whole duty of men and women.

In her position, and with her opportunities, she soon knew all that was to be known about Margaret's affections, and also about Barton's.

"He's as much in love with you as a man can be, my dear," she said to Margaret. "Not worthy of him? Your past a barrier between you and him? Nonsense, Daisy; that is *his* affair. *I* know you are as good a girl as ever lived. Your father was poor, no doubt, and that wretched Mr. Cranley,—yes, he was a wretch,—had a spite against you. I don't know why, and you won't help me to guess. But Mr. Barton is too much of a man to let that kind of thing disturb him, I'm sure. You are afraid of something, Margaret. Your nerves have been unstrung. I'm sure I don't wonder at it. I know what it is to lose one's nerve. I could no more drive now, as I used to do, or go at the fences I used to think *nothing* of! But once you are married to a man like Mr. Barton, who is there can frighten you? And as to being poor," and Mrs. St. John Deloraine explained her generous views as to arrangements on her part, which would leave Margaret far from portionless.

Then Margaret would cry a little, and lay her

head on her friend's shoulder, and the friend would shed some natural tears for company; and they would have tea, and Barton would call, and look a great deal at his boots, and fidget with his hat.

"I 've no patience with you, Mr. Barton," said Mrs. St. John Deloraine at last, when she had so manœuvred as to have some private conversation with him, and Barton had unpacked his heart. "I 've no patience with you. Why, where is your courage? 'She has a history?' She's been persecuted. Well, where 's your chivalry? Why don't you try your fortune? There never was a better girl, nor a pleasanter companion when she 's not—when she 's not disturbed by the nervousness of an undecided young man. If you don't take your courage in both hands, I will carry Margaret off on a yachting voyage to the Solomon Islands, or Jericho, or somewhere. Look here, I am going to take her for a drive in Battersea Park: it is handy, and looking very pretty, and as lonely as Tadmor in the wilderness. We will get out and saunter among the ponds. I shall be tired, and sit down; you will show Margaret the marvels of natural history in the other pond, and when you come back you will both have made up your minds!"

With this highly transparent ruse Barton expressed his content. The carriage was sent for, and in less than half-an-hour Barton and Margaret were standing alone, remote, isolated from the hum of men, looking at a pond where some water-hens were diving, while a fish ("coarse," but not uninteresting) occasionally flopped on the surface. The trees—it was the last week of May—were in the earliest freshness of their foliage; the air, for a wonder, was warm and still.

"How quiet and pretty it is!" said Margaret. "Who would think we were in London?"

Barton said nothing. Like the French parrot

mentioned by Sir Walter Scott, he thought the more.

"Miss Burnside!" he exclaimed suddenly, "we have known each other now for some time."

This was a self-evident proposition; but Margaret felt what was coming, and trembled. She turned for a moment, pretending to watch the movements of one of the water-fowls. Inwardly she was nerving herself to face the hard part of her duty, and to remind Barton of the mystery in her life.

"Yes," she said at last; "we have known each other for some time, and yet—you know nothing about me."

With these words she lifted her eyes and looked him straight in the face. There seemed a certain pride and nobility in her he had not seen before, though her beautiful brown eyes were troubled, and there was a mark of pain on her brow. What was she going to tell him?

Barton felt his courage come back to him.

"I know one thing about you, and that is enough for me. I know I love you!" he said. "Margaret, can't you care for me a little? Don't tell me anything you think you should not say. I'm not curious."

Margaret turned back again to her inspection of the pond and its inmates, grasping the iron railing in front of her and gazing down into the waters, so that he could not see her face.

"No," she said at last, in a very low voice; "it would not be fair." Then, after another pause, "There is some one——" she murmured, and stopped.

This was the last thing Barton had expected. If she did not care for *him*, he fancied she cared for nobody.

"If you like some one better——" he was beginning.

"But I don't like him at all," interrupted Margaret. "He was very kind, but——"

"Then can't you like *me?*" asked Barton; and by this time he was very near her, and was looking down into her face, as curiously as she was still studying the natural history of Battersea Ponds.

"Perhaps I should not; it is so difficult to know," murmured Margaret. And yet her rosy confusion, and beautiful lowered eyes, tender and ashamed, proved that she knew very well. Love is not always so blind but that Barton saw his opportunity, and was assured that she had surrendered. And he prepared, a conqueror, to march in with all the honours and rewards of war; for the place was lonely, and a covenant is no covenant until it is sealed.

But when he would have kissed her, Margaret disengaged herself gently, with a little sigh, and returned to the strong defensible position by the iron railings.

"I must tell you about myself," she said. "I had promised never to tell, but I must. I have been so tossed about, and so weak, and so many things have happened." And she sighed.

However impassioned a lover may be, he does naturally prefer that there should be no mystery about her he adores. Barton had convinced himself (aided by the eloquence and reposing on the feminine judgment of Mrs. St. John Deloraine) that Margaret could have nothing that was wrong to conceal. He could not look at her frank eyes and kind face and suspect her; though, to anyone but a lover, these natural advantages are no argument. He, therefore, prepared to gratify an extreme curiosity, and, by way of comforting and aiding Margaret, was on the point of assuming an affectionate attitude. But she moved a little

away, and, still turning towards the friendly ponds, began her story:

"The person—the gentleman whom I was thinking of was a friend of my father's, who, at one time, wanted him"—here Margaret paused—"wanted me to—to be his wife some day."

The rapid imagination of Barton conjured up the figure of a well-to-do local pawnbroker, or captain of a trading vessel, as the selected spouse of Margaret. He fumed at the picture in his fancy.

"I didn't like him much, though he certainly was very kind. His name,—but perhaps I should not mention his name?"

"Never mind," said Barton. "I daresay I never heard of him."

"But I should tell you, first of all, that my own name is not that which you, and Mrs. St. John Deloraine know me by. I had often intended to tell her; but I have become so frightened lately, and it seemed so mean to be living with her under a false name. But to speak of it brought so many terrible things back to mind."

"Dear Margaret," Barton whispered, taking her hand.

They were both standing, at this moment, with their backs to the pathway, and an observer might have thought that they were greatly interested in the water-fowl.

"My name is not Burnside," Margaret went on, glancing over her shoulder across the gardens and towards the river; "my name is——"

"Daisy Shields!" cried a clear voice. "Daisy, you're found at last, and I've found you! How glad Miss Marlett will be!"

But, by this time the astonished Barton beheld Margaret in the impassioned embrace of a very pretty and highly-excited young lady; while Mrs.

St. John Deloraine, who was with her, gazed with amazement in her eye.

"Oh, my dear!" Miss Harman (for it was that enthusiast) hurried on, in a pleasant flow of talk, like a brook, with pleasant interruptions. "Oh, my dear! I was walking in the park with my maid, and I met Mrs. St. John Deloraine, and she said she had lost her friends, and I came to help her to look for them; and I 've found *you!* It 's like Stanley finding Livingstone. *How I Found Daisy.* I 'll write a book about it. And where *have* you been hiding yourself? None of the girls ever knew anything was the matter,— only Miss Marlett and me! And I 've left for good; and she and I are quite friends, and I 'm to be presented next Drawing Room."

While this address (which, at least, proved that Margaret had acquaintances in the highest circles) was being poured forth, Mrs. St. John Deloraine and Barton were observing all with unfeigned astonishment and concern.

They both perceived that the mystery of Margaret's past was about to be dispelled, or rather, for Barton, it already *was* dispelled. The names of Shields and Miss Marlett had told *him* all that he needed to know. But he would rather have heard the whole story from his lady's lips; and Mrs. St. John Deloraine was mentally accusing Janey Harman of having interrupted a "proposal," and spoiled a darling scheme.

It was therefore with a certain most unfamiliar sharpness that Mrs. St. John Deloraine, observing that the day was clouded over, requested Margaret to return to the carriage.

"And as Miss Harman seems to have *a great deal* to say to you, Margaret," added the philanthropic lady, "you two had better walk on as fast as you can; for *you* must be very careful not to

catch cold! I see Miss Harman's maid waiting for her in the distance there. And you and I, Mr. Barton, if you will give me your arm, will follow slower; I 'm not a good walker."

"*Now*," said Barton's companion eagerly, when Margaret and Janey, about three yards in advance, might be conventionally regarded as beyond ear-shot,—"*Now*, Mr. Barton, am I to congratulate you?"

Barton gave a little shamefaced laugh uneasily.

"I don't know,—I hope so,—I 'm not sure."

"Oh, you're not satisfactory,—not at all satisfactory! Are you *still* shilly-shallying? What is the matter with young people?" cried the veteran of twenty-nine. "Or was it that wretched Janey, rushing in, like a cow in a conservatory? She 's a regular school-girl!"

"It isn't that exactly, or at least that 's not all. I hope—I think she does care for me, or will care for me, a little."

"Oh, bother!" said Mrs. St. John Deloraine. She would not, for all the world, reveal the secrets of the Confessional, and tell Barton what she knew of the state of Margaret's heart. But she was highly provoked, and showed it in her manners, at no time applauded for their repose.

"The fact is," Barton admitted, "that I 'm so taken by surprise I hardly know where I am! I do think, if I may say so without seeming conceited, that I have every reason to be happy. But, just as she was beginning to tell me about herself, that young lady, who seems to have known her at school, rushed in, and explained the whole mystery."

"Well," said Mrs. St. John Deloraine, turning a little pale, and looking anxiously at Barton, "was it anything so very dreadful?"

"She called her Daisy Shields," said Barton.

"Well, suppose she did! I always fancied, after what happened at *The Bunhouse*, that that dreadful Mr. Cranley sent her to me under a false name. It was not *her* fault. The question is, What was her reason for keeping her real name concealed?"

"That's what I'm coming to," said Barton. "I have a friend, a Mr. Maitland."

"Mr. Maitland of St. Gatien's?" asked the widow.

"Yes."

"*I* know him."

"Yes, I have often heard him speak of you," said Barton. "Well, he had a *protégée*—a kind of ward, to tell a long story in few words,—a girl whom he had educated, and whom he was under some kind of promise to her father to marry. The father died suddenly; the girl disappeared mysteriously from school at the same moment; and Maitland, after many efforts, has never been able to find out anything about her. Now, this girl's name, this girl in whom my friend was interested, was Margaret Shields. That is the very name by which your friend, Miss Harman, called Margaret. So, you see, even if I am right, and if she *does* care for me, what a dreadful position I am in! I want to marry the girl to whom my friend is, more or less, engaged! My friend, after doing his best to find his ward, and after really suffering a great deal of anxiety and annoyance, is living abroad. What am I to say to him?"

"Mr. Barton," said Mrs. St. John Deloraine, "perhaps you alarm yourself too much. I think"—here she dropped her voice a little—"I think—I don't think Mr. Maitland's *heart* is very deeply concerned about Miss Shields. I may be wrong, but I know him pretty well,"—she gave a little nervous laugh,—"and I don't think he's in *love* with Margaret."

By the time she reached the end of this interrupted and tentative discourse Mrs. St. John Deloraine was blushing like a rose in June.

Barton felt an enormous weight lifted from his heart, and a flood of welcome light poured into his mind. The two philanthropists were in love with each other!

"He's an awfully good fellow, Maitland," he replied. "But you are right; I'm *sure* you are right. You must know. He is *not* in love with Margaret."

Mrs. St. John Deloraine seemed not displeased at the tribute to Maitland's unobtrusive virtues, and replied:

"But he will be very glad to hear that she is found at last, and quite safe; and I'll write to him myself, this very evening. I heard from him,—about a charity, you know,—a few days ago, and I have his address."

By this time they had reached the carriage. Janey, with many embraces, tore herself from Margaret, and went off with her attendant; while Mrs. St. John Deloraine, with a beaming face, gave the coachman the order "Home."

"We shall see you to-morrow at luncheon," she cried to Barton; and no offer of hospitality had ever been more welcome.

He began to walk home, turning over his discoveries in his thoughts, when he suddenly came to a dead halt.

"By George!" he said out loud; "I'll go back and have it out with her at once. I've had enough of this shilly-shally."

He turned and strode off in the direction of Cheyne Walk. In a few minutes he was standing at the familiar door.

"Will you ask Miss—Miss Burnside if she can see me for one moment?" he said to the servant.

"I have forgotten something she wished me to do for her," he added in a mumble.

Then he was taken into the boudoir, and presently Margaret appeared, still in her bonnet and furs.

"I couldn't help coming back, Margaret," he said, as soon as she entered the room. "I want to tell you that it is all right, that you needn't think—I mean, that I know all about it, and that there is nothing, *nothing* to prevent us,—I mean, Margaret, if you *really* care for me——" Then he came to a dead stop.

It was not a very easy situation. Barton could not exactly say to Margaret, "My dear girl, you need not worry yourself about Maitland. He does not care a pin for you: he'll be delighted at being released. He is in love with Mrs. St. John Deloraine."

That would have been a statement both adequate and explicit; but it could not have been absolutely flattering to Margaret, and it would have been exceedingly unfair to her hostess.

The girl came forward to the table, and stood with her hand on it, looking at Barton. She did not help him out in any way; her attitude was safe, but embarrassing.

He made a charge, as it were, at the position—a random, desperate charge.

"Margaret, can you trust me?" he asked.

She merely put out her hand, which he seized.

"Well then, believe me when I tell you that I know everything about your doubts; that I know more than anyone else can do; and that there is *nothing* to prevent us from—being happy. More than that, if you will only agree to make me happy, you will make every one else happy too. Can't you take it on trust? Can't you believe me?"

Margaret said nothing; but she hid her face on Barton's shoulder. She *did* believe him.

The position was carried!

CHAPTER XV.

The Mark of Cain.

NEXT morning Barton entered his sitting-room in very high spirits, and took up his letters. He had written to Maitland the night before, saying little but, "Come home at once. Margaret is found. She is going to be my wife. You can't come too quickly, if you wish to hear of something very much to your advantage." A load was off his mind, and he felt as Romeo did just before the bad news about Juliet reached him.

In this buoyant disposition, Barton opened his letters. The first was in a hand he knew very well,—that of a man who had been his fellow-student in Paris and Vienna, and who was now a prosperous young physician. The epistle ran thus :

"Dear Barton,—I 'm off to the West of Ireland, for a fortnight. People are pretty fit, as the season has not run far. Most of my patients have not yet systematically over-eaten themselves. I want you to do something for me. Martin and Wright, the lawyers, have a queer little bit of medical jurisprudence, about which young Wright, who was at Oriel in our time, asked my opinion. I recommended him to see you, as it is more in your line; and *my* line will presently be attached to that eminent general practitioner, 'The Blue Doctor.' May he prosper with the Galway salmon !

"Thine,

"Alfred Franks."

"Lucky beggar!" thought Barton to himself;

but he was too happy to envy even a man who had a fortnight of salmon-fishing before him.

The next letter he opened was in a blue envelope, with the stamp of Messrs. Martin and Wright. The brief and formal note which it contained requested Dr. Barton to call, that very day if possible, at the chambers of the respectable firm, "on business of great importance."

"What in the world can they want?" thought Barton. "Nobody can have left *me* any money. Besides, Franks says it is a point in medical jurisprudence. That sounds attractive. I 'll go down after breakfast."

He walked along the sunny Embankment, and that bright prospect of houses, trees, and ships had never seemed so beautiful. In an hour he was in Lincoln's Inn Fields, and had shaken hands with young Wright, whom he knew; had been introduced to old Wright, a somewhat stately man of business, and had taken his seat in the chair sacred to clients.

"Dr. Barton," said old Mr. Wright, solemnly, "you are, I think, the author of this book?"

He handed to Barton a copy of his own volume, in its grey paper cover, *Les Tatouages, Etude Médico-Légale.*

"Certainly," said Barton. "I wrote it when I was in Paris. I had plenty of chances of studying tattooing in the military hospitals."

"I have not read it myself," said old Mr. Wright, "because I am not acquainted with the French language; but my son tells me it is a work of great learning."

Barton could only bow, and mutter that he was glad Mr. Wright liked it. *Why* he should like it, or what the old gentleman wanted, he could not even imagine.

"We are at present engaged in a very curious

case, Dr. Barton," went on the lawyer, "in which we think your special studies may assist us. The position is this: Nearly eight months ago, a client of ours died—a Mr. Richard Johnson, of Linkheaton, in the North. You must excuse me if I seem to be troubling you with a long story?"

Barton mentioned that he "was delighted," and added, "Not at all," in the vague modern dialect.

"This Mr. Richard Johnson, then, was a somewhat singular character. He was what is called a 'statesman' in the North. He had a small property of about four hundred acres, on the marches, as they say, or borders of the Earl of Birkenhead's lands. Here he lived almost alone, and in a very quiet way. There was not even a village near him, and there were few persons of his own position in life, because his little place was almost embedded, if I may say so, in Lord Birkenhead's country, which is pastoral. You are with me, so far?"

"Perfectly," said Barton.

"This Mr. Johnson, then, lived quite alone, with an old housekeeper, dead since his decease, and with one son, called Richard, like himself. The young man was of an adventurous character, a ne'er-do-weel in fact; and about twenty years ago he left Linkheaton, after a violent quarrel with his father. It was understood that he had run away to sea. Two years later he returned; there was another quarrel, and the old man turned him out, vowing that he would never forgive him. But, not long after that, a very rich deposit of coal—a *very* rich deposit," said Mr. Wright, with the air of a man tasting most excellent claret—"was discovered on this very estate of Linkheaton. Old Johnson, without much exertion on his part, and simply through the payment of royalties by the company that worked the coal, became

exceedingly opulent, in what you call most affluent circumstances."

Here Mr. Wright paused, as if to see whether Barton was beginning to understand the point of the narrative, which, it is needless to remark, he was *not*. There is no marked connection between coal mines, however lucrative, and *Les Tatouages, Etude Médico-Légale*.

"In spite of his wealth, Mr. Johnson in no way changed his habits. He invested his money carefully, under our advice, and he became, as I said, an extremely warm man. But he continued to live in the old farmhouse, and did not, in any way, court society. To tell the truth, except Lord Birkenhead, who is our client, I never knew anyone who was at all intimate with the old man. Lord Birkenhead had a respect for him, as a neighbour and a person of the old-fashioned type. Yes," Mr. Wright added, seeing that his son was going to speak, "and, as you were about to say, Tom, they were brought together by a common misfortune. Like old Mr. Johnson, his lordship has a son who is very, very—unsatisfactory. His lordship has not seen the Honourable Mr. Thomas Cranley for many years; and in that lonely country the two boys had been companions in wild amusements, long before. He is *very* unsatisfactory, the Honourable Thomas Cranley;" and Mr. Wright sighed heavily, in sympathy with a client so noble and so afflicted.

"I know the beast," said Barton, without reflecting.

Mr. Wright looked at him in amazement and horror. "The beast!" A son of Lord Birkenhead's called "The beast!"

"To return to our case, Dr. Barton," he went on severely, with some stress laid on the *doctor*. "Mr. Johnson died, leaving, by a will made on

his death-bed, all that he possessed to his son Richard, or, in case of his decease, to the heirs of his body lawfully begotten. From that day to this we have hunted everywhere for the man. We have traced him all over the world: we have heard of him in Australia, Burmah, Guiana, Smyrna, but at Smyrna we lose sight of him. This advertisement," said the old gentleman, taking up the outside sheet of the *Times*, and folding it so as to bring the second column into view, "remained for more than seven months unanswered, or only answered by impostors and idiots."

He tapped his finger on the place as he handed the paper to Barton, who read aloud:

"LINKHEATON.—If Richard Johnson, of Linkheaton, Durham, last heard of at Smyrna in 1875, will apply to Messrs. Martin and Wright, Lincoln's Inn Fields, he will hear of something very greatly to his advantage. His father died, forgiving him. A reward of £1,000 will be paid to anyone producing Richard Johnson, or proving his decease."

"As a mixture of business with the home affections," said old Mr. Wright proudly (for the advertisement was of his own composition), "I think that leaves little to be desired?"

"It is admirable," said Barton,—"admirable; but may I ask——"

"Where the tattooing comes in?" said Mr. Wright. "I am just approaching *that*. The only person from whom we received any reliable information about Richard Johnson was an old shipmate of his, a wandering adventurous character, now, I believe, in Paraguay, where we cannot readily communicate with him. According to his account, Johnson was an ordinary seafaring man, tanned, and wearing a black beard, but easily to

be recognised for an excellent reason. *He was tattooed almost all over the whole body.*"

Barton nearly leaped out of his chair, the client's chair, so sudden a light flashed on him.

"What is the matter, Dr. Barton? I *thought* I should interest you; but you seem quite excited."

"I really beg your pardon," said Barton. "It was automatic, I think; besides, I *am* extremely interested in tattooing."

"Then, sir, it is a pity you could not have seen Johnson. He appears, from what our informant tells us, to have been a most remarkable specimen. He had been tattooed by Australian blacks, by Burmese, by Arabs, and, in a peculiar blue tint and to a particular pattern, by the Dyacks of Borneo. We have here a rough chart, drawn by our informant, of his principal decorations."

Here the lawyer solemnly unrolled a great sheet of drawing-paper, on which was rudely outlined the naked figure of a man, filled up, on the breast, thighs, and arms, with ornamental designs.

The guess which made Barton leap up had not been mistaken: he recognised the tattooings he had seen on the dead body of Dicky Shields.

This confirmation of what he had conjectured, however, did not draw any exclamation or mark of excitement from Barton, who was now on his guard.

"This is highly interesting," he said, as he examined the diagram; "and I am sure, Mr. Wright, that it should not be difficult to recognise a claimant with such remarkable peculiarities."

"No, sir; it is easy enough, and we have been able to dismiss scores of sham Richard Johnsons. But one man presented himself the day before yesterday—a rough sailor fellow, who went straight to the point; asked if the man we wanted had any private marks; said he knew what they were, and

showed us his wrist, which exactly, as far as we could verify the design, corresponded to that drawing."

"Well," asked Barton, controlling his excitement by a great effort, "what did you do with him?"

"We said to him that it would be necessary to take the advice of an expert before we could make any movement; and, though he told us things about old Johnson and Linkheaton, which it seemed almost impossible that anyone but the right man could have known, we put him off till we had seen you, and could make an appointment for you to examine the tattooings. *They* must be dealt with first, before any other identification."

"I suppose you have made some other necessary inquiries? Did he say why he was so late in answering the advertisement? It has been out for several months."

"Yes, and that is rather in his favour," said Mr. Wright. "If he had been an impostor on the look-out, he would probably have come to us long ago. But he has just returned from the Cape, where he had been out of the way of newspapers, and he did not see the advertisement till he came across it three or four days ago."

"Very well," said Barton. "Make an appointment with the man for any time to-morrow, and I will be with you."

As he said this he looked very hard and significantly at the younger Mr. Wright.

"Very good, sir; thank you. Shall we say at noon to-morrow?"

"With pleasure," answered Barton, still with his eye on the younger partner.

He then said good-bye, and was joined, as he had hoped, in the outer office by young Wright.

"You had something to say to me?" asked the junior member of the firm.

"Several things," said Barton, smiling. "And first, would you mind finding out whether the coast is clear—whether any one is watching for me?"

"Watching for you! What do you mean?"

"Just take a look round the square, and tell me whether any suspicious character is about."

Young Wright, much puzzled, put on his hat, and stood lighting a cigarette on the outer steps.

"Not a soul in sight but lawyer's clerks," he reported.

"Very well; just tell your father that, as it is a fine morning, you are taking a turn with me."

Barton's friend did as he wished, and presently the pair had some serious conversation.

"I 'll do exactly as you suggest, and explain to my father," said the young lawyer as they separated.

"Thanks; it is so much easier for you to explain than for a stranger like myself," said Barton, and strolled westward by way of Covent Garden.

At the noted establishment of Messrs. Aminadab, theatrical costumiers, Barton stopped, went in, was engaged some time with the Messrs. Aminadab, and finally had a cab called for him, and drove home with a pretty bulky parcel.

* * * * * *

At five minutes to twelve on the following day, a tall, burly, mahogany-coloured mariner, attired, for the occasion, in a frock-coat and hat, appeared in Lincoln's Inn Fields. He seemed to be but ill acquainted with those coasts, and mooned about for some minutes before he reached the door of Messrs. Wright. Then he rang, the door was opened, and he was admitted into the presence of the partners.

"I have come, gentlemen, in answer to your

letter," he said with a Northern burr, bowing awkwardly, and checking a disposition to salute by touching his forelock.

His eyes wandered round the room, where he saw no one but the partners, with whom he was already acquainted, and a foreign-looking gentleman,—a gentleman with hay-coloured hair, a soft hat, spectacles, and a tow-coloured beard. He had a mild, short-sighted expression, a pasty complexion, and the air of one who smoked too much.

"Good-morning, Mr.—h'm—Mr. Johnson," said old Mr. Wright. "As we told you, sir, we have, as a necessary preliminary to the inquiry, requested Professor Lieblein to step in and inspect —h'm—the personal marks of which you spoke. Professor Lieblein, of Bonn, is a great authority on these matters,—author of *Die Tattuirung*, a very learned work, I am told."

Thus introduced, the Professor bowed.

"Glad to meet you, sir," said the sailor-man gruffly, "or any gentleman as really knows what's what."

"You have been a great traveller, sir?" said the learned Professor, whose Teutonic accent it is superfluous to reproduce. "You have in many lands travelled? So!"

"Yes, sir; I've seen the world."

"And you are much tattooed: it is to me very interesting. You have by many races been decorated?"

"Most niggers have had a turn at me, sir!"

"How happy you are to have had such experiences! Now, the Burmese—ah! have you any little Burmese marks?"

"Yes, sir; from the elbow to the shoulder," replied the seafaring man. "Saving your presence, I'll strip to the buff."

"The buff! What is that? Oh, thank you,

sir," this was in reply to young Mr. Wright. "The naked body! why, buff! 'Buff,' the abstract word, the actual stuff, the very *wesen* of man unclothed. 'Buffer,' the concrete man, in the 'buff,' in the flesh; it is *sehr interessant*."

While the learned Professor muttered these metaphysical and philological reflections, the seaman was stripping himself to the waist.

"That's the Burmese style, sir," he said, pointing to his shoulders and upper arm.

These limbs were tattooed in a beautiful soft blue; the pattern was a series of diminishing squares, from which long narrow triangles ran down to the elbow-joints.

"*Sehr schön, sehr schön*," exclaimed the delighted Professor. "It is very *hübsch*, very pretty, very well. We cannot now decorate, we Germans. Ach, it is mournful!" and he sighed. "And now, sir, have you to show me any *moko?* A little *moko* would be very instructive."

"Moko? Rather! The Maori pattern, you mean; the New Zealand dodge? Just look between my shoulders," and the seaman turned a broad bare back, whereon were designs of curious involuted spirals.

"That is right, that is right," whispered the Professor. "*Moko, schlange*, serpent-marks, so they call it in their tongue. Better *moko*, on an European man, have I never seen. You observe," he remarked to the elder Mr. Wright, waving his hand as he followed the tattooed lines,—"you observe the serpentine curves? Very beautiful."

"Extremely interesting," said Mr. Wright, who, being no anthropologist, seemed nervous and uncomfortable.

"Corresponds, too, with the marks in the picture," he added, comparing the sketch of the original Shields with the body of the Claimant.

"Are you satisfied now, governor?" asked the sailor.

"One little moment. Have you on the Red Sea coast been? Have you been at Suakim? Have you any Arab markings?"

"Oh, yes; here you are!" and the voyager pointed to his breast.

The Professor inspected, with unconcealed delight, some small tattooings of irregular form.

"It is, it is," he cried, "the *wasm*, the *sharat*,* the Semitic tribal mark, the mark with which the Arab tribes brand their cattle! Of old time they did tattoo it on their bodies. The learned Herr Professor Robertson Smith, in his leedle book, do you know what he calls that very mark, my dear sir?"

"Not I," said the sailor; "I 'm no scholar."

"He says it was,—I do not say he is right," cried the Professor in a loud voice, pointing a finger at his victim's breast—"he says it was THE MARK OF CAIN!"

The sailor, beneath his mahogany tan, turned a livid white, and grasped at a bookcase by which he stood.

"What do you mean?" he cried, through his chattering teeth; "what do you mean with your damned Hebrew-Dutch and your mark of Cain? The mark's all right! A Hadendowa woman did it in Suakim years ago. Ain't it on that chart of yours?"

"Certainly, good sir; it is," answered the Professor. "Why do you so agitate yourself? *The*

* *Sharat* or *Shart*.—"The *shart* was in old times a tattooed mark. . . . In the patriarchal story of Cain . . . the institution of blood revenge is connected with a 'mark' which Jehovah appoints to Cain. Can this be anything else than the *shart*, or tribal mark, which every man bore on his person?"—ROBERTSON SMITH, *Kinship in Ancient Arabia*, p. 215.

proof is complete!" he added, still pointing at the sailor's breast.

"Then I 'll put on my togs, with your leave: it 's none so warm!" grumbled the man.

He had so far completed his dressing that he was in his waistcoat, and was just looking round for his coat.

"Stop!" said the Professor. "Hold Mr. Johnson's coat for a moment!"

This was to young Wright, who laid his hands on the garment in question.

"You must be tired, sir," said the Professor, in a very soft voice. "May I offer you a leedle cigarette?"

He drew from his pocket a silver cigarette case, and, in a thoroughly English accent, he went on:

"I have waited long to give you back your cigarette case, which you left at your club, Mr. Thomas Cranley!"

The sailor's eye fell on it. He dashed the silver box violently to the ground, and trampled on it, then he made one rush at his coat.

"Hold it, hold it!" cried Barton, laying aside his Teutonic accent,—"hold it: there 's a revolver in the pocket!"

But there was no need to struggle for the coat.

The sailor had suddenly staggered and fallen, a crumpled but not unconscious mass, on the floor.

"Call in the police!" said Barton. "They 'll have no difficulty in taking him."

"This is the man against whom you have the warrant," he went on, as young Wright opened the door, and admitted two policemen. "I charge the Honourable Thomas Cranley with murder!"

The officers lifted the fallen man.

"Let him be," said Barton. "He has collapsed. Lay him on the floor: he 's better so. He needs

a turn of my profession: his heart 's weak. Bring some brandy."

Young Wright went for the spirits, while the frightened old lawyer kept murmuring—

"The Hon. Thomas Cranley *was* always *very* unsatisfactory!"

It had been explained to the old gentleman that an impostor would be unmasked, and a criminal arrested; but he had *not* been informed that the culprit was the son of his great client, Lord Birkenhead.

Barton picked up the cigarette case, and as he, for the first time, examined its interior, some broken glass fell out and tinkled on the floor.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Verdict of Fate.

MAITLAND did not dally long in the Levant after getting Barton's letter. He was soon in a position to receive, in turn, the congratulations which he offered to Margaret and Barton with unaffected delight.

Mrs. St. John Deloraine and he understood each other!

Maitland, for perhaps the first time in his life, was happy in a thoroughly human old-fashioned way.

Meanwhile the preparations for Cranley's trial dragged on. Interest, as usual, was frittered away in examinations before the magistrates.

But, at last, the day of judgment shone into a

Court crowded as Courts are when it is the agony of a gentleman that the public has to view.

When the prisoner, uttering his last and latest falsehood, proclaimed himself "Not Guilty," his voice was clear and strong enough, though the pallor of his face attested, not only the anxiety of his situation, but the ill-health which, during his confinement, had often made it doubtful whether he could survive to plead at the bar of any earthly judgment.

The Counsel for the Crown, opening the case, stated the theory of the Prosecution, the case against Cranley. His argument is here offered in a condensed form:

First, Counsel explained the position of Johnson, or Shields, as the unconscious heir of great wealth; and set forth his early and late relations with the prisoner, a dishonoured and unscrupulous outcast of Society. The prisoner had been intimately acquainted with the circumstances of Johnson's early life, with his history and his home. His plan therefore was to kill him, and then personate him. A celebrated case, which would be present to the minds of the Jury, proved that a most plausible attempt at the personation of a long-missing man might be made by an uneducated impostor, who possessed none of the minute local and personal knowledge of the prisoner. Now, to personate Johnson, a sailor whose body was known to have been indelibly marked by the tattooing of various barbarous races, it was necessary that the prisoner should be similarly tattooed. It would be shown that, with unusual heartlessness, he had persuaded his victim to reproduce on his body the distinctive marks of Johnson, and then had destroyed him with fiendish ingenuity, in the very act of assuming his personality. The very instrument

it might be said, which stamped Cranley as Johnson, slew Johnson himself, and the process which hall-marked the prisoner as the heir of vast wealth, stigmatised him with the brand of Cain. The personal marks which seemed to establish the Claimant's case, demonstrated his guilt. He was detected by the medical expert brought in to prove his identity, and was recognised by that gentleman, Dr. Barton, who would be called, and who had once already exposed him in a grave social offence—cheating at cards. The same witness had made a *post-mortem* examination of the body of Richard Johnson, and had then suspected the method by which he had been murdered.

The murder itself, according to the theory of the prosecution, was committed in the following manner: Cranley, disguised as a sailor (the disguise in which he was finally taken), had been in the habit of meeting Johnson, and being tattooed by him, in a private room of the *Hit or Miss* tavern, in Chelsea. On the night of February 7th, he met him there for the last time. He left the tavern late, at nearly twelve o'clock, telling the landlady that "his friend," as he called Johnson, had fallen asleep upstairs. On closing the establishment, the landlady, Mrs. Gullick, found the room, an upper one, with dormer windows opening on the roof, empty. She concluded that Johnson —or Shields, as she called him—had wakened, and left the house by the back staircase, which led to a side alley. This way Johnson, who knew the house well, often took, on leaving. On the following afternoon, however, the dead body of Johnson, with no obvious marks of violence on it, was found in a cart belonging to the Vestry—a cart which, during the night, had remained near a shed on the piece of waste ground adjoining the *Hit or Miss*. A coroner's jury had taken the view that John-

son, being intoxicated, had strayed into the piece of waste ground (it would be proved that the door in the palisade surrounding it was open on that night), had lain down in the cart, and died in his sleep of cold and exposure. But evidence derived from a later medical examination would establish the presumption, which would be confirmed by the testimony of an eye-witness, that death had been wilfully caused by Cranley, employing a poison which it would be shown he had in his possession,—a poison which was not swallowed by the victim, but introduced by means of a puncture into the system. The dead man's body had then been removed to a place where his decease would be accounted for as the result of cold and exhaustion. A witness would be put in the box who, by an extraordinary circumstance, had been enabled to see the crime committed by the prisoner, and the body carried away, though, at the moment, he did not understand the meaning of what he saw. As the circumstances by which this witness had been enabled to behold what was done at dead of night, in an attic room, locked and bolted, and not commanded from any neighbouring house nor eminence, were exceedingly peculiar, testimony would be brought to show that the witness really had enjoyed the opportunity of observation which he claimed.

On the whole, then, as the prisoner had undeniably personated Johnson, and claimed Johnson's property; as he undeniably had induced Johnson, unconsciously, to aid him in the task of personation; as the motive for the murder was plain and obvious; as Johnson, according to the medical evidence, had probably been murdered; and as an eye-witness professed to have seen, without comprehending, the operation by which death, according to the medical theory, was caused,

the counsel for the prosecution believed that the jury could find no other verdict than that the prisoner had wilfully murdered Richard Johnson on the night of February 7th.

This opened the case for the Crown. It is unnecessary to recapitulate the evidence of all the witnesses who proved, step by step, the statements of the prosecution. First was demonstrated the identity of Shields with Johnson. To do this cost enormous trouble and expense; but Johnson's old crony, the man who drew the chart of his tattoo marks, was at length discovered in Paraguay, and, by his aid and the testimony he collected, the point was satisfactorily made out. It was, of course, most important in another respect, as establishing Margaret's claims on the Linkheaton estate.

The discovery of the body of Johnson (or Shields) in the snow was proved by our old friends Bill and Tommy.

The prisoner was recognised by Mrs. Gullick as the sailor gentleman who had been with Johnson on the last night of his life. In spite of the difference of dress, and of appearance caused by the absence of beard,—for Cranley was now clean shaved,—Mrs. Gullick was positive as to his voice and as to his eyebrows, which were peculiarly black and mobile.

Barton, who was called next, and whose evidence excited the keenest interest, identified the prisoner as the man whom he had caused to be arrested in the office of Messrs. Martin and Wright, and whom he had known as Cranley. His medical evidence was given at considerable length, and need not be produced in full detail. On examining the body of Richard Johnson, his attention had naturally been directed chiefly to the tattooings. He had for some years been

deeply interested, as an ethnologist, in the tattooed marks of various races. He had found many curious examples on the body of the dead man. Most of the marks were obviously old; but in a very unusual place, generally left blank—namely, behind and under the right shoulder—he had discovered certain markings of an irregular character, clearly produced by an inexperienced hand, and perfectly fresh and recent. They had not healed, and were slightly discoloured. They could not, from their position, possibly have been produced by the man himself. Microscopic examinations of these marks, in which the colouring matter was brown, not red or blue, as on the rest of the body, showed that this colouring matter was of a character familiar to the witness as a physiologist and scientific traveller. It was the *Woorali*, or arrow poison of the Macoushi Indians of Guiana.

Asked to explain the nature of this poison to the Court, the witness said that its "principle" (to use the term of the old medical writers) had not yet been disengaged by Science, nor had it ever been compounded by Europeans. He had seen it made by the Macoushi Indians, who combined the juice of the Woorali vine with that of certain bulbous plants, with certain insects, and with the poison fangs of two serpents, boiling the whole amidst magical ceremonies, and finally straining off a thick brown paste, which, when perfectly dry, was used to venom the points of their arrows. The poison might be swallowed by a healthy man without fatal results. But if introduced into the system through a wound, the poison would act almost instantaneously, and defy analysis. Its effect was to sever, as it were, the connection between the nerves and the muscles, and the muscles used in respiration being

thus gradually paralysed, death followed within a brief time, proportionate to the size of the victim, man or animal, and the strength of the dose.

Traces of this poison, then, the witness had found in the fresh tattoo marks on Johnson's body.

The witness now produced the sharp wooden needle, the stem of the leaf of the coucourite palm, which he had found among Johnson's tattooing materials, in the upper chamber of the *Hit or Miss*. This needle had been, he said, the tip of one of the arrows used for their blow pipes, by the Macoushi of Guiana.

Barton also produced the Oriental silver cigarette case, the instrument of his cheating at baccarat, which Cranley had left in the club on the evening of his detection. He showed that the case had contained a small crystal receptacle, intended to hold opium. This crystal had been broken by Cranley when he dashed down the case, in the office of Martin and Wright. But crumbs of the poison,—"Woorali," or "Ourali,"—perfectly dry, remained in this receptacle. It was thus clear that Cranley, himself a great traveller, was possessed of the rare and perilous drug.

The medical evidence having been heard, and confirmed in its general bearing by various experts, and Barton having stood the test of a severe cross-examination, William Winter was called.

There was a flutter in the Court, as a pale and partly paralysed man was borne in on a kind of litter, and accommodated in the witness-box.

"Where were you," asked the counsel for the prosecution, when the officer had sworn the witness, "at eleven o'clock on the night of February 7th?"

"I was on the roof of the *Hit or Miss* tavern."

"On which part of the roof?"

"On the ledge below the dormer window at the

back part of the house, facing the waste ground behind the plank fence."

"Will you tell the Court what you saw while you were in that position?"

Winter's face was flushed with excitement; but his voice, though thin, was clear as he said:

"There was a light streaming through the dormer window beside which I was lying, and I looked in."

"What did you see?"

"I saw a small room, with a large fire, a table, on which were bottles and glasses, and two men, one seated, the other standing."

"Would you recognise either man if you saw him?"

"I recognise the man who was seated, in the prisoner at the bar; but at that time he wore a beard."

"Tell the Court what happened."

"The men were facing me. One of them—the prisoner—was naked to the waist. His breast was tattooed. The other—the man who stood up—was touching him with a needle, which he applied, again and again, to a saucer on the table."

"Could you hear what they said?"

"I could; for the catch of the lattice window had not caught, and there was a slight chink open."

"You listened?"

"I could not help it; the scene was so strange. I heard the man with the needle give a sigh of relief, and say, 'There, it 's finished, and a pretty job too, though I say it.' The other said, 'You have done it beautifully, Dicky; it 's a most interesting art. Now, just out of curiosity, let *me* tattoo *you* a bit.' The other man laughed, and took off his coat and shirt while the other dressed. 'There 's scarce an inch of me plain,' he said, 'but you can try your hand here,' pointing to the lower part of his shoulder."

"What happened then?"

"They were both standing up now. I saw the prisoner take out something sharp; his face was deadly pale, but the other could not see that. He began touching him with the sharp object, and kept chaffing all the time. This lasted, I should think, about five minutes, when the face of the man who was being tattooed grew very red. Then he swayed a little, backward and forward, then he stretched out his hands like a blind man, and said, in a strange, thick voice, as if he was paralysed, 'I'm very cold; I can't shiver!' Then he fell down heavily, and his body made one or two convulsive movements. That was all."

"What did the prisoner do?"

"He looked like death. He seized the bottle on the table, poured out half a tumbler full of the stuff in it, drank it off, and then fell into a chair, and laid his face between his hands. He appeared ill, or alarmed, but the colour came back into his cheek after a third or fourth glass. Then I saw him go to the sleeping man and bend over him, listening apparently to his breathing. Then he shook him several times, as if trying to arouse him. But the man lay like a log. Finally, about half-an-hour after what I have described, he opened the door and went out. He soon returned, took up the sleeping man in his arms—his weight seemed lighter than you would expect—and carried him out. From the roof I saw him push the door in the palisade leading into the waste land, a door which I myself had left open an hour before. It was not light enough to see what he did there; but he soon returned alone and walked away."

Such was the sum of Winter's evidence, which, if accepted, entirely corroborated Barton's theory of the manner of the murder.

In cross-examination, Winter was asked the very natural question—

"How did you come to find yourself on the roof of the *Hit or Miss* late at night?"

Winter nearly rose from his litter, his worn face flushed, his eye sparkling.

"*Sir, I flew!*"

There was a murmur and titter through the court, which was, of course, instantly suppressed.

"You *flew!* What do you mean by saying that you flew?"

"I am the inventor of a flying machine, which, for thirty years, I have laboured at and striven to bring to perfection. On that one night, as I was experimenting with it, where I usually did, inside the waste land bordering on the *Hit or Miss*, the machine actually worked, and I was projected in the machine, as it were, to some height in the air, coming down with a fluttering motion, like a falling feather, on the roof of the *Hit or Miss*."

Here the learned counsel for the defence smiled with infinite expression at the jury.

"My lord," said the counsel for the prosecution, noting the smile, and the significant grin with which it was reflected on the countenances of the twelve good men and true, "I may state that we are prepared to bring forward a large mass of scientific evidence—including a well-known man of science, the editor of *Wisdom*, a popular journal which takes all knowledge for its province—to prove that there is nothing physically impossible in the facts deposed to by this witness. He is at present suffering, as you see, from a serious accident caused by the very machine of which he speaks, and which can be exhibited, with a working model, to the Court."

"It certainly requires corroboration," said the judge. "At present, so far as I am aware, it is contrary to scientific experience. You can prove, perhaps, that, in the opinion of experts, these

machines have only to take one step further to become practical modes of locomotion. But *that* is the very step *qui coûte*. Nothing but direct evidence that the step has been taken,—that a flying machine, on this occasion, actually *flew* (they appear to be styled *volantes*, *a non volando*),—would really help your case, and establish the credibility of this witness."

"With your lordship's learned remarks," replied the counsel for the Crown, "I am not the less ready to agree, because I *have* an actual eye-witness, who not only saw the flight deposed to by the witness, but reported it to several persons, who are in court, on the night of its occurrence, so that her statement, though disbelieved, was the common talk of the neighbourhood."

"Ah! that is another matter," said the judge.

"Call Eliza Gullick," said the counsel.

Eliza was called, and in a moment was curtsying, with eagerness, but perfect self-possession.

After displaying an almost technical appreciation of the nature of an oath, Eliza was asked:

"You remember the night of the 7th of February?"

"I remember it very well, sir."

"Why do you remember it so well, Eliza?"

"Becos such a mort o' things happened, sir, that night."

"Will you tell his lordship what happened?"

"Certainly, my lord. Mr. Toopny gave us a supper, us himps, my lord, at the *Hilarity*; for he said——"

"Never mind what he said, tell us what happened as you were coming home."

"Well, sir, it was about eleven o'clock at night, and I was turning the lane into the *Hit or Miss*, when I heard an awful flapping and hissing and whirring, like wings working by steam, in the

waste ground at the side of the lane. And, as I was listening,—oh, it frightens me now to think of it,—oh, sir——"

"Well, don't be alarmed, my good child! What occurred?"

"A great thing like a bird, sir, bigger than a man, flew up over my head, higher than the houses. And then—did you ever see them Japanese toys, my lord, them things with two feathers and a bit of India-rubber as you twist round and round and toss them up and they fly——"

"Well, my girl, I have seen them."

"Well, just as if it had been one of them things settling down, the bird's wings turned round and fluttered and shook, and at last it all lighted, quite soft like, on the roof of our house, the *Hit or Miss*. And there I saw it crouching when I went to bed, and looked out o' the window, but they wouldn't none o' them believe me, my lord."

There was a dead silence in the Court as Eliza finished this extraordinary confirmation of Winter's evidence, and wove the net inextricably round the prisoner.

Then the silence was broken by a soft crashing sound, as if something heavy had dropped a short distance on some hard object.

All present turned their eyes from staring at Eliza to the place whence the sound had come.

The prisoner's head had fallen forward on the railing in front of him.

One of the officers of the Court touched him on the shoulder.

He did not stir. They lifted him. He moved not.

The faint heart of the man had fluttered with its last pulsation. The evidence had sufficed for him without verdict or sentence. As he had slain his victim, so Fate slew him, painlessly, in a moment!

EPILOGUE.

AND what became of them all?

He who does not tell, on the plea that he is "competing with Life," which never knits up a plot, but leaves all the threads loose, acts unfairly.

Mrs. St. John Deloraine is now Mrs. Maitland, and the happy couple are visiting the great Colonies, seeking a site for a new settlement of the Unemployed, who should lead happy lives under the peaceful sway of happy Mrs. Maitland.

Barton and Mrs. Barton have practised the Endowment of Research, in the case of Winter, who has quite recovered from his injuries, and still hopes to fly. But he has never trusted himself again on his machine, which, moreover, has never flown again. Winter, like the alchemist who once made a diamond by chance, in Balzac's novel, has never recovered the creative moment. But he makes very interesting models, in which Mrs. Barton's little boy begins to take a lively interest.

Eliza Gullick, declining all offers of advancement unconnected with the British Drama, clings to the profession for which, as Mrs. Gullick maintains, she has a hereditary genius.

"We hear," says the *Athenæum*, "that the long promised edition of *Demetrius of Scepsis*, by Mr. Bielby of St. Gatien's, is in the hands of the delegates of the Clarendon Press."

But Fiction herself is revolted by the improbability of the statement that an Oxford Don has finished his *magnum opus!*

EXPLICIT.

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